BEING HUMAN, BEING CHURCH:
THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY
FOR ECCLESIOLOGY

by

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A dissertation submitted to
the Faculty of McMaster Divinity College
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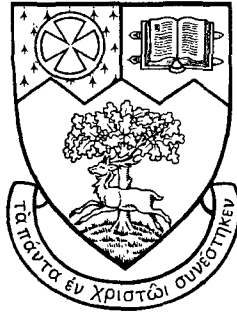2011

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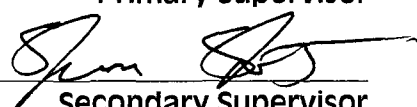this Ph.D. doctoral dissertation by

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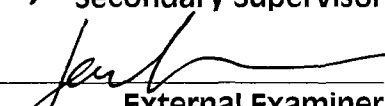is hereby accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
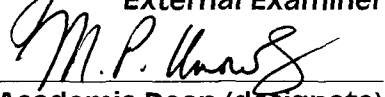
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ABSTRACT

Being Human, Being Church:
The Significance of Theological Anthropology for Ecclesiology

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Doctor of Philosophy, 2011

One's conception of human personhood deeply impacts one's understanding and

practice of community. Contemporary culture lacks precision and agreement in defining

the human person. Such 'anthropological agnosticism' also affects the church, leading to

devastating consequences concerning its inner sociality, cultural engagement, and pursuit

of justice. This dissertation argues that a significant step forward is to gain a better

understanding of theological anthropology and apply it consistently to ecclesiology.

Specifically, a theological understanding of the human person as a relational, rational,

and eschatological creature leads to a conception of the church as relational, rational, and

eschatological communities of the new humanity. This approach overcomes problematic

dualisms and false dichotomies presently plaguing the church's inner life and outward

mission, in part by accentuating the ethical dimension that pervades its whole existence.

Primary conversation partners include Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Miroslav Volf, and Stanley

Grenz. Alasdair MacIntyre and Wolfhart Pannenberg are also influential.

Part I consists of two chapters. Chapter one explores the difficulties of defining

the human person in contemporary culture and the resulting consequences for community

and ethics. Chapter two analyzes six typological ways of construing community based

upon conflicting views of the human person. It evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of each, concluding that none is fully satisfying theologically. Part II (chapters 3–5) constructs a theological anthropology in trinitarian perspective. It presents a three-dimensional view of the human person as: a relational creature whose *telos* is to love God and fellow human beings; a rational creature whose *telos* is to know God and understand God's world; and an eschatological creature whose *telos* is to serve God as a steward-priest of (new) creation. Part III (chapters 6–8) constructs an ecclesiology corresponding to the themes developed in Part II, depicting the church as relational, rational, and eschatological communities of the new humanity defined and oriented by love, faith, and hope. The concluding chapter summarizes the arguments developed and their implications for Christian community and ethics. It then explores some preliminary implications of viewing the church as God's new humanity, called to promote and embody the welfare and flourishing of all human beings.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

There are many whom I want to acknowledge and thank. In particular, I am deeply grateful:

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I dedicate this work, this labour of love, to Elena, Josiah, and Samuel. You continually help me to understand and live out what it means to be more genuinely human. I simply would not be the same person without you. Thank you for your patience, encouragement, and support. This has been a marathon for all of us! Finally, to God be all glory, honour, and praise. "Praise the Lord! Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever" (Ps 106:1).

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Contents

Introduction

As human beings we are all members of particular communities and our understanding of community is intimately linked with our understanding of what it means to be human.[1] There are many rival conceptions of the human person; indeed, many such rival conceptions exist in contemporary Western culture.[2] This link between what it means to be a human person and what it means to be in community maintains in Christian ecclesial communities as well. The nature of Christian community is shaped by a Christian understanding of the human person, whether or not this link is well understood, articulated, and coherently worked out in particular Christian traditions.

This dissertation explores the significance of theological anthropology (specifically, a trinitarian theological anthropology) for ecclesiology and the implications of this relationship for two aspects of the church's reason for being. First, what is the ground and character of the church's inner sociality (i.e., its inner community life)? Stated differently, what kind of human community is the church and what sort of life sustains it? Second, what is the ground and character of the church's public mission (i.e., its outward engagement with the world)? In other words, what should characterize the church's relationship to social ethics, to culture, and to global justice?

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1. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 105–6.

2. Linda Woodhead, "Theology and the Fragmentation of the Self," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 1 (March, 1999): 59–66. Woodhead, in dialogue with S. Tipton, identifies and explicates four strands of modern identity: the authoritative strand (the bestowed self), the liberal humanistic strand (the rational self), the expressive strand (the boundless self), and the utilitarian strand (the effective self).

A.   Context for and Progression of the Argument

1.   Basic problem

The lack of precision and agreement in much of contemporary thought about what it means to be human has led to some destructive consequences for both church and society, with potentially even more devastating implications. Specifically, vagueness about what it means to be human and about the human *telos* renders problematic: (a) the basic intrinsic worth of the human being, on which conceptions of human dignity are usually based; (b) the grounds and purpose of human community; and (c) clear and coherent grounds for personal, social, and global ethics.

2.   Impact on the church

The church throughout the ages always finds itself in a mediating position of contextualizing its life and message within its surrounding culture. In the contemporary setting, an inadequate theological understanding of the meaning and *telos* of the human person often distorts the church's understanding of its own nature (its inner integrity, the nature of its sociality) as well as its understanding of its mission in the world and the intrinsic relation of that mission to personal, social, and global ethics. A deficient theological anthropology leads the church to emphasize and attend to certain aspects of being human while simultaneously neglecting others. What should be viewed as an integrated whole (a holistically redemptive community of human beings) becomes disintegrated and fragmented. As a result, dualisms and false dichotomies begin to plague the inner life of the church, such as inner-outer purity or righteousness, justification-sanctification, individualism-collectivism, personal-communal piety, spirituality-ethics, and discipleship-evangelism. Moreover, similar dualisms and false dichotomies distort

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the relationship between the church and the world, some of which include secular-sacred, syncretism-withdrawal, triumphalism-powerlessness, justice as extrinsic/secondary versus justice as all-encompassing, and mission as soul-saving versus mission as social transformation.

3.   A way forward

A significant step forward in overcoming these problems is to recapture the significance of theological anthropology for ecclesiology. In this work I explore this theme in dialogue with three important theologians who explicitly make the link between theological anthropology and ecclesiology (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Miroslav Volf, and Stanley Grenz) and develop implications for the grounds and character of the sociality of the church, the church's engagement with culture (including personal, social, and global ethics), and the intrinsic connection between the two. Specifically, I set forth a theological anthropology that depicts the human person as: (1) a relational creature (relational ontology, created to be in other-oriented relationships with God and other human beings); (2) a rational creature (seeing 'rational' in dialogue with 'ethical' leading to the concept of *wisdom*); and (3) an eschatological creature (created for a purpose and destiny).

Moreover, I construct this theological anthropology within the framework of a trinitarian theology of personhood. It is trinitarian in two primary respects. First, it views human personhood as being in some way analogous to divine personhood (even while preserving a qualitative difference between God and human beings). Second, what it views as being unique about human beings is not something that can be attributed comprehensively to their own biological 'nature' as such (some static quality or capacity

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they possess), rather it arises as a result of God's uniquely triune personal way of relating

to them as Creator, Reconciler, and Transformer.[3] It is also important to note that in this

trinitarian framework the three persons of the Trinity always work inseparably (I

therefore reject modalist or tritheistic paradigms), yet within that unity of operations each

trinitarian person takes a primary or lead role in making us genuinely human. Thus, with

regard to the relational aspect of being human: The **Son** reconciles us to the Father

through the Holy Spirit, who unites us to Christ and draws us into fellowship with God

and one another. With regard to the rational aspect of being human: we are opened and

led to discern the **Father's** creational design, through the Son's wisdom, in and by the

Spirit's illumination and empowerment. With regard to the eschatological aspect of being

human: the **Holy Spirit** transforms us into the likeness of the Son and orients us toward

the Father.

In addition, I argue that an ethical dimension to being human both pervades and

proceeds from each of the three aforementioned aspects of theological anthropology;

thus, human being is intrinsically ethical being. I therefore explore the ethics of being

human in each of the anthropology chapters, under the rubric of: *love* and the relational

ethical dimension (chapter 3), *faith* and the rational ethical dimension (chapter 4), and

hope and the eschatological ethical dimension (chapter five).

In parallel with this, I set forth an ecclesiology that views the church as the *new*

humanity, which exists concretely as a relational, rational, and eschatological community.

As such, the church is the community in which redeemed persons are formed to become

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3.   However, as James Peterson points out, human beings do possess an *emergent capacity* that makes a relationship with God possible. James C. Peterson, "*Homo Sapiens* as *Homo Dei*: Paleoanthropology, Human Uniqueness, and the Image of God," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 27, no. 1 (2011): 17. For more on this point, see footnote #2 in chapter three of this dissertation.

more genuinely human, being remade gradually into the image of Christ. This means that being in the church is intrinsically related to the believer's salvation, not because the church is an institutional dispenser of salvation but because it is the community in which reconciliation is embodied and transformation takes place (ecclesiology thus plays a role in mediating and preserving the intrinsic link between justification and sanctification, corresponding with the primacy of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as corporate sacramental and ethical ordinances). It is the place in which redeemed human persons practice and live out concretely their restored relationships with God and others. Since the church is such a transformative community, it is also intrinsically an *ethical* community—a place of personal and social ethical orientation and formation. Moreover, its particular way of being an ethical community leads to the implication that the church exists not *merely* for its own sake but also for the sake of the world, in the proleptic, eschatological form of 'foretaste', 'catalyst', or 'leaven' of the present-yet-coming kingdom of God. I explore these themes in dialogue with three major New Testament metaphors for the church, namely the Body of Christ, the People of God, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

The threefold ethical dimension of the church as the new humanity forms the basis of its engagement with the world. The church lives out of its ethical dimension and engages the world not merely by its own strength, vision, and resources, but by participating by the Spirit in Christ's ministry and mission in the world. Thus, it engages the world relationally by participating in Christ's *priestly* ministry, as ambassadors of reconciliation. It engages the world rationally (in wisdom) by participating in Christ's *prophetic* ministry, as witnesses and servants of the truth. It engages the world

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eschatologically by participating in Christ's *reign*, as heralds and representatives of the

kingdom and as steward-priests of the new creation.[4]

In the concluding chapter I summarize the implications of viewing ecclesiology in

light of theological anthropology. First, I summarize implications relating to the inner life

of the church as the new humanity. During this section, I revisit and conclude my

argument that the ecclesiology developed in the dissertation is superior to other

contemporary conceptions of Christian community that are based on rival views of

human personhood. Second, I summarize the implications relating to the church's

outward engagement with its surrounding culture. I emphasize that the church engages

culture by participating by the Spirit in Christ's mission. I then propose a revision of

missional ecclesiology that proceeds by way of a trinitarian modification of missional

theo-logic. In short, I argue that one ought not to deduce ecclesiology directly from

missiology in a strictly linear way. Rather, one ought first to develop a trinitarian

theological anthropology, which then allows one to specify the *grounds, character, and*

goal of the church's missional nature as the new humanity. This approach prevents

missional ecclesiology from degenerating into mere functionalism, pragmatism, and/or

activism, because it grounds the church's mission holistically (i.e., in a more integrated

way) in the church's nature as a redeemed and redeeming human community of love.

Finally, I explore some preliminary implications and applications of this ecclesiology for

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4.   To make the connections explicit: (1) The church as a relational community of love lives out an
ethic of love and ministers to the world by participating in Christ's priestly ministry as ambassadors of
reconciliation; (2) The church as a rational community of faith (as A. MacIntyre has demonstrated, a
'rationality' implies both a worldview involving ultimate commitments and a tradition that embodies that
worldview) lives out an ethic of wisdom (faithful reasoning) and ministers to the world by participating in
Christ's prophetic ministry as witnesses and servants of the truth; (3) The church as an eschatological
community of hope lives out an ethic of hope and ministers to the world by participating in Christ's reign
as heralds and representatives of the kingdom and as steward-priests of new creation.

the church's God-given mandate to serve general human flourishing.[5] While I cannot

address these issues in anything like a comprehensive manner (each one is potentially a

future book project in itself), I can posit some basic guidelines regarding how one might

proceed in light of the conclusions reached in this dissertation about the significance of

theological anthropology for ecclesiology.

4. Thesis statement

There is a lack of precision and agreement in much of contemporary thought

about what it means to be human. This is the case for the church as well, leading to

devastating consequences for the church concerning its inner sociality, its outer

engagement with culture, and its pursuit of justice. This dissertation argues that a

significant step forward is to gain a better understanding of theological anthropology and

apply it consistently to ecclesiology. Specifically, it argues that a theological

understanding of the human person as a relational, rational, and eschatological creature,

to whom God relates as Reconciler, Creator, and Transformer leads to a church that exists

as relational, rational, and eschatological communities of the new humanity.[6] This way of

viewing the church helps to overcome problematic dualisms and false dichotomies that

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5. 'Human flourishing' is standard nomenclature for natural law approaches to ethics. While I want to affirm some aspects of natural law ethics (for example, the existence of something like a moral law with corresponding natural consequences for obedience and disobedience), my understanding of human flourishing is somewhat different. For example, a theological understanding of genuine human flourishing considers both natural and supernatural aspects and/or orientations (e.g., body and soul; time and eternity) and requires both natural knowledge (derived from reason) and revelatory knowledge (received as God's own self-communication to us) of what it means to be a human person. Non-theological accounts of human beings as social, rational, and future-oriented beings are certainly possible and may very well resonate with theological approaches. However, my theological description of human persons as relational, wise, and eschatological beings before God, while not contrary to reason, is also dependent upon revelation and thus not self-evident on the basis of reason alone (whether in its rational or empirical forms).

6. In employing the words 'community' or 'communities' I am trying to avoid overly institutional connotations presently associated with words such as 'church' or 'congregation.' To draw a parallel with Luther, I am using 'community' in a way similar to Luther's preference for 'Gemeinde' over 'Kirche'.

continually plague its inner life and its outward mission to the world, in part by

accentuating the ethical dimension that pervades the church's whole existence.

B.   Previous Research that is Relevant to the Topic

There are three strands of research that are directly relevant to the topic. The first

strand, which includes authors such as Colin Gunton, John Macmurray, Alistair

McFadyen, John Zizioulas, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, and Stanley Grenz, is theological

work done on the relationship between the Trinity and the human person.[7] The primary

insights gained here concern the intrinsic relationality of both God and human beings.

This is often opposed to the Aristotelian view that *relation* belongs to the category of

accident rather than substance, and is therefore something extrinsic to substance, essence,

or being. According to trinitarian critics, such a view leads to individualistic and static

notions of God (i.e., Aristotle's Unmoved Mover) and the human person in which

relationships are not essential but peripheral to being and personhood. This research

advances a relational understanding of the human person, but does not develop the full

implications of this for ecclesiology, ethics, and mission.

A second strand of research focuses on communitarian ecclesiology. This strand

explicitly links (and develops to some extent) a trinitarian conception of personhood with

a trinitarian ecclesiology. It tends to proceed in one of two directions. The first (e.g.,

Stanley Grenz, Emil Brunner) focuses on the church as a community of persons in

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7.   Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many God, Creation, and the Culture of Modernity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1991); Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood. A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002); Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993); and Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

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relationship.[8] It provides a helpful critique of institutional views of the church and is faithful to the predominantly relational portrayals of the church in the New Testament. However, it is not sufficiently missional or ethical (oriented to justice) in its characterization of the church. The second direction theologians take (e.g., John Zizoulas, Miroslav Volf) is to apply insights gained about the relational approach to theological anthropology and church to the problem of church unity.[9] Such work is very helpful when considering and weighing the tensions involved in genuine church unity, but it tends to lack a sufficient missional quality. Both of these approaches run the risk of degenerating into sentimental communitarianism if they are not qualified and developed in certain ways.[10]

A third strand of research invokes the Trinity as the basis for constructing a social program for mission or justice. One approach, characteristic of some liberation and feminist theologians (e.g., Leonardo Boff, Juan Segundo, Anne Carr, Cynthia Campbell), is to employ the Trinity as a model for just societal relations or structures of social and/or gender equality.[11] A second approach, characteristic of missional ecclesiology (e.g.,

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8. Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, trans. Oliver Wyon (London: Lutterworth, 1939). See also Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), chapter 3.

9. E.g., Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 1998 and Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*.

10. I cite Volf as an example of applying trinitarian ecclesiology primarily to the problem of church unity, not as one lacking in ethical concern (Volf's writings usually have both implicit and explicit ethical implications).

11. Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis. The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1986) and *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988); Juan Segundo, *Our Idea of God* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1974); Anne Carr, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988); Cynthia Campbell, "The Triune God: A Model for Inclusion," *Austin Seminary Bulletin* 97 (1981): 13–20 and "Imago Trinitatis: the Being of God as a Model for Inclusion," *Austin Seminary Bulletin* 102 (1987): 5–15. See also Jürgen Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981); Leonard Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1944); Miroslav Volf, "'The Trinity as our Social Program': The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement,"

Darrell Guder) is to employ the Trinity as a model for mission. The missional view

argues that mission is not just a sub-category of ecclesiology, but is part of the essence of

what it means to be the church. This view is based on the missional or sending nature of

God. As the Father sends the Son and the Spirit in the economy of salvation, so he also

sends the Church into the world to serve God's redemptive mission (i.e., the *missio Dei*).

The implication is that the Church does not "do" mission; rather, the Church "is" mission.

The Church does not "have" a mission; rather, God has created a sent-Church, a

missional Church.[12] Both of these approaches are quite helpful in some respects, namely

in emphasizing that justice and mission are intrinsic to the very essence of the church.

However, when separated from a sufficiently relational anthropology and from

communitarian conceptions of the church, they run the risk of degenerating into

pragmatism and/or functionalism.

C.   Contribution of the Present Project

As discussed above, many trinitarian conceptions of the church focus on the

relational character of the human person and the church in order to deal with questions of

unity and diversity. Others place a communitarian focus on the church but fail to account

sufficiently for the church's missional nature. Still others focus on mission and/or justice

without a sufficiently robust theological anthropology and communitarian ecclesiology.

Most of these approaches lack sustained reflection on the ethical nature of the church,

derived from God's purposes for redeemed human persons that constitute the new

humanity. This dissertation contributes to the discussion by employing theological

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Modern Theology 14, no. 3 (July 1998): 403–23; and John L. Gresham, Jr., "The Social Model of the Trinity and its Critics," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46, no. 3 (1993): 325–43.

    12.   Darrell L. Guder, "Missional Theology for a Missionary Church," *Journal for Preachers* 22, no. 1 (1998): 5 and Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

anthropology in the service of ecclesiology, in order to articulate a theology of church that sufficiently integrates being human, being in community, and being missional, making explicit the intrinsic connection of each of these to spirituality and ethics.[13] Its primary goal is to construct a theology of the church as the new humanity, existing concretely in relational, rational, and eschatological communities of love, faith, and hope.

In the course of reaching this primary goal, the dissertation makes three other contributions to contemporary ecclesiology. First, it offers its ecclesiology as a way of resolving or transcending dualisms and false dichotomies that plague both the inner life of the church and its outer engagement with the surrounding culture (see section A. 2. above). In place of these dualisms and false dichotomies, it constructs a more holistic or integrated view of personhood and community and a corresponding approach to cultural engagement based upon a threefold model of cross, incarnation, and resurrection (see chapters 6–8). Second, by constructing ecclesiology in light of a trinitarian theological anthropology, the dissertation performs an anthropological modification of social trinitarianism. It does not envision a literal parallel between Trinity and the church, but depicts redeemed human persons as exocentric (other-centered) beings bound together "in Christ" by the indwelling Spirit and thus mirroring the Trinity analogously (see chapter 3).[14] Finally, in the course of its analysis the dissertation constructs a novel

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13. Thus, the history of this discussion began with a relational critique of individualistic ecclesiology leading to communitarianism. It proceeded with a social critique of communitarian ecclesiology leading to missional (as well as liberationist and feminist) ecclesiology. This dissertation continues the discussion with a trinitarian revision of missional theo-logic and an anthropological and ethical revision of ecclesiology.

14. As an *analogy* (something that participates in what it depicts), this version of social trinitarianism avoids both literalism and mere symbolism. In this sense, the church is a sacrament of the Trinity.

typology, which compares and contrasts rival contemporary conceptions of the human person and their corresponding views of human community and church (see chapter 2).[15]

D.   Methods / Models / Frameworks Operative in the Project

The dissertation is a constructive project in systematic theology, more specifically ecclesiology. As such, the primary question it poses is systematic and thematic in nature, rather than biblical or historical. Consequently, its methodology is oriented primarily toward addressing broad, systematic (and often philosophical), cross-textual issues, rather than focusing on biblical-exegetical or historical details. Thus, it engages biblical and historical scholarship only when such scholarship is relevant to the question(s) at hand.[16] A broad, synthetic approach is fitting because human personhood and community is a broad and synthetic subject involving several intersecting disciplines. The strength of this approach is that it allows an author to relate and discuss interconnected themes in an integrated way and to demonstrate the far reaching significance of their scope and implications. The weakness of the approach is that it is unable to treat every subtopic in comprehensive detail (especially the intricate, intra-disciplinary debates of particular specializations). The method thus serves the purpose of developing its main theme while inviting further conversation, debate, criticism, and elaboration from other scholars in the joint pursuit of knowledge (scholarship *can be* a human and humanizing conversation!).

In the course of answering its primary and secondary questions (i.e., related sub-topics), this dissertation employs several methods and/or frameworks.

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15.   A typology classifies according to conceptual differences and is generally used for broad affinity classes in order to attain conceptual clarity. For the difference between typology and taxonomy, see section D.2 below.

16.   Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture· A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 179–90.

1. Historical-philosophical narrative

The first chapter makes use of a historical-philosophical narrative (e.g.,

MacIntyre, Olsen, Rorty), in order to describe the context which gave rise to the problem

that the present dissertation seeks to address. Specifically, it narrates the abandonment of

a theological and teleological approach to anthropology, the resulting lack of precision in

attempts to define human personhood, and the corresponding problems this poses for our

understanding and practice of human community and society. This chapter does not set

forth the thesis of the dissertation, but rather sets the stage for that argument. Thus, it

employs this method in a descriptive rather than a constructive manner. In other words,

its historical-philosophical narrative uses primary and interpretive literature. In particular,

it engages the work of Stanley Grenz, Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and, to a

lesser extent, Stanley Hauerwas and F. LeRon Shults.[17]

2. Typology

In chapter two of the dissertation, I employ a typological method to compare and

contrast typical rival views of what it means to be human and their corresponding

conceptions of community in modern and postmodern culture. This method has its

theological precedents in writers such as H. Richard Niebuhr and Avery Dulles.[18] Crucial

to understanding the typological method and employing it fruitfully is the recognition that

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17. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004) and *The Social God and the Relational Self*, F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Taylor, *Sources of the Self*; Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1975), *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), and *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

18. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001) and Dulles, *Models of the Church*.

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it is a heuristic device that posits constructs of general motifs and ideas. I do not intend a taxonomy, which is a system of classification according to observations of empirical differences and is generally used in the biological sciences to describe individuals. Rather, a typology classifies according to conceptual differences and is generally used for broad affinity classes.[19] As Niebuhr explicitly states,

> A type is always something of a construct, even when it has not been constructed prior to long study of many historical individuals and movements. When one returns from the hypothetical scheme to the rich complexity of individual events, it is evident at once that no person or group ever conforms completely to a type.[20]

Thus, typology is a method befitting *conceptual clarification* as opposed to historical or empirical investigation. As such, "The method of typology, though historically inadequate, has the advantage of calling to attention the continuity and significance of the great motifs that appear and reappear in the long wrestling of Christians with their enduring problem."[21] This approach fits the purpose of chapter two of the dissertation, which aims to compare and contrast the conceptual differences between rival conceptions of the human person and their implications for understanding the character and goal of community.

3.   Application of a hermeneutical-doctrinal lens

The primary argument of the dissertation, regarding the significance of theological anthropology for ecclesiology, brings together two related doctrines and interprets one in light of the other. It therefore relies on the application of a hermeneutical lens (theological anthropology) through which it explores its primary subject matter (ecclesiology). Two relevant theological precedents for this include the ecclesiology of

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19.   Kenneth D. Bailey, *Typologies and Taxonomies: An Introduction to Classification Techniques* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1994), 6.

20.   Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 43–44.

21.   Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 44.

Vatican II (which conceives of the church through the lens of sacramental theology) and missional ecclesiology (which conceives of the church through the lens of missiology).[22] It should be noted that in this dissertation the application of this hermeneutical lens does not proceed in a strictly linear fashion. While the primary aim is to rethink ecclesiology in light of theological anthropology, it is also recognized that the latter also receives clarification from trinitarian theology and ecclesiology. In other words, what it means to be human and what it means to be the church are dialogically related and mediated by trinitarian theology. This leads to the application of a trinitarian framework for theological anthropology and ecclesiology.

4.   A trinitarian framework for theological anthropology and ecclesiology

In this dissertation, I employ a trinitarian framework in two different ways. First, I use it to stimulate reflection on human persons as being, in some ways, analogous to divine persons (chapter 3). Similarly, I employ it to describe Christian social relations in the church as being, in some ways, analogous to the trinitarian relations of divine persons (in the ecclesiology section). This approach has its roots in social models of the Trinity, from Augustine (his mutual love model, appropriated by Jonathan Edwards) to Richard of St. Victor, to the trinitarian personalism of Bonhoeffer, Barth, and Brunner, through to modern social trinitarians such as Colin Gunton, John Zizioulas, Catherine LaCugna, Stanley Grenz and Miroslav Volf.[23] My approach takes its initial cue from two sources,

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22. Regarding sacramental ecclesiology, see the Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium* 9, 48 (cited by Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 56); see also Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology. Ecumenical, Historical and Global Perspectives* (Dowers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 28–29. Regarding missional ecclesiology, see Guder, ed., *Missional Church*.

23. Augustine, *The Trinity*, vol. 5 of *The Works of St. Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City, 1991); Steven M. Studebaker, *Jonathan Edwards' Social Augustinian Trinitarianism in Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008) and "Jonathan Edwards's Social *Augustinian* Trinitarianism: an Alternative to a Recent Trend," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56, no. 3 (2003): 268–85; Richard of St. Victor, "Book Three

namely the Augustinian mutual love model of the Trinity (qualified and developed in dialogue with T. F. Torrance) and Bonhoeffer's relational interpretation of the *imago Dei* (qualified and developed in dialogue with Pannenberg, Grenz, and Volf).[24]

Second, I employ a trinitarian framework to account sufficiently for God's threefold way of relating to humans beings and thereby constituting their genuine humanity.[25] Thus, each chapter on theological anthropology (3–5) employs a trinitarian framework to discuss a particular aspect of being human. As mentioned previously, the three persons of the Trinity always work inseparably and thus all three pervade every aspect of Christian life and doctrine. As Grenz rightly observes, "A theological construction that is truly trinitarian does not simply involve organizing beliefs around the three persons of the Trinity. More importantly, it entails viewing all aspects of Christian

of the Trinity." in *Richard of St Victor: The Twelve Patriarchs, The Mystical Ark, and Book Three of the Trinity*, trans. Grover A. Zinn (New York: Paulist, 1979); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, vol. 3 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Creation: Church Dogmatics III/1* (London: T & T Clark, 2009); Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, trans. Oliver Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953) and *Man in Revolt*; Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three, and the Many* and *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991); Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* and *Communion & Otherness*, ed. Paul McPartlan (London: T & T Clark, 2006); LaCugna, *God For Us*, Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self* and *Theology*; Volf, *After Our Likeness*. See also: Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*; McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood*; and Boff, *Trinity and Society*.

24.   Dietrich Bonhoeffer (*Creation and Fall*, 65ff.) proposed that a relational analogy (*analogia relationis*) maintains between divine and human personhood. In contrast to an analogy of being (*analogia entis*), which posits a correspondence between God's being (essence) and the human being as a substance (intrinsic qualities such as rationality or consciousness), an analogy of relationship posits a correspondence between divine and human personhood on the level of relationship. Human personhood is analogous to divine personhood because it is inherently relational. To be a human person is to be a being-in-relationship with God (who first relates to humans and thereby constitutes their personhood) and with other human beings. For Bonhoeffer, this *analogia relationis* is not something that humans possess in and of themselves, apart from God. It consists only in the fact that humanity points to or illustrates the divine, and it extends only as far as human beings fulfil this purpose in relationship to God and others. Karl Barth appropriated Bonhoeffer's *analogia relationis* in his 1942 *Doctrine of Creation* ("The Work of Creation," *Church Dogmatics* III/1).

25.   That God's relating to human beings constitutes their personhood is a point made throughout David Kelsey's *Eccentric Existence. A Theological Anthropology*, 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009).

doctrine in a trinitarian light."[26] Theologians such as Karl Barth and Wolfhart

Pannenberg are exemplary in this regard.[27]

E.   Theological Commitments of the Author

I write self-consciously from a broad, evangelical perspective, in continuity with

the apostolic, Nicene, and Chalcedonian tradition of historic Christianity. Such a

perspective prioritizes the authority of Scripture, even while maintaining the importance

of religious experience, tradition, and reason.[28] With regards to ecclesial tradition, my

own interpretation of Scripture, in ongoing dialogue with tradition, reason, and the

guidance of the Holy Spirit, leads me to endorse a version of the Free Church tradition—

namely the Baptist tradition—though not without reservation or qualification. In

particular, two major aspects of the Free Church tradition resonate with me. First, I

believe the notion of the believer's church represents a faithful and fitting interpretation

of the New Testament data. Second, its congregational structure resonates with me, as it

seems to be in keeping with the New Testament's portrayal of the flexibility of church to

adapt its structures to pursue its mission effectively in concrete and changing cultural

contexts (I prefer Luther over Calvin on this point). My perspective is that the New

Testament does not present us with one single model for church governance, but rather

several or perhaps even limitless possibilities (within the bounds of faithfulness to Christ

as head), especially if we find underlying principles rather than specific and rigid

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26. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self,* x.

27. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology,* 3 vols., trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991–98).

28. As Stephen Fowl writes, "[G]iven the ends towards which Christians interpret their scripture, Christian interpretation of scripture needs to involve a complex interaction in which Christian convictions, practices, and concerns are brought to bear on scriptural interpretation in ways that both shape that interpretation and are shaped by it" (*Engaging Scripture,* 8). See also Daniel J. Treier, "Scripture and Hermeneutics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 35–49.

commands.[29] The congregational model accentuates the New Testament's portrayal of

diversity in the early Christian communities and, accordingly, promotes freedom to

structure the church in a way that best fits a congregation's present context. Furthermore,

the flexible and non-hierarchical (yet deeply covenantal) nature of the congregational

model holds promise for being and doing church within the fluid and changing context of

postmodern culture.[30]

F.   Primary Conversation Partners

While the dissertation engages the work of many theologians through the course

of its argument, my primary conversation partners are Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Miroslav

Volf, and Stanley Grenz. This is most evident in the theological anthropology section

(chapters 3–5). Chapters six through eight explore the significance of theological

anthropology for ecclesiology. They depend on these three theologians for their basis but

are also constructive in nature, developing the implications of the previous three chapters.

There are several reasons for consulting these particular theologians, reasons which relate

both to my purposes and to my prior theological assumptions and commitments. First, all

three stand in the Protestant tradition and affirm the primacy of Scripture for theology,

while appreciating the interpretive and formative role of church tradition, reason, and

experience of the Holy Spirit. Second, all three explicitly relate theological anthropology

29.   Charles Ringma, *Catch the Wind: The Shape of the Church to Come—And Our Place in It* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1994), 105.

30.   Having said all of this, a Congregationalist approach must be careful to maintain a kingdom perspective, which acknowledges that God wants to use many churches to reach cities and nations. Otherwise, a Congregationalist vision can too easily become myopic and self-centered. It can begin to assume that its own corner of the kingdom is all that exists. Perhaps it can learn to appreciate the importance of the oneness of the universal church from the Roman Catholic tradition. This does not mean accepting the need for an Episcopal structure headed by bishops, but it does mean taking the unity of the universal church seriously and making an intentional effort to build relationships with other churches. It has to remember that it is a servant and witness of the kingdom, not the kingdom itself. Just as the diverse members of a local congregation make up one community, so the local congregation is itself a uniquely contributing part of Christ's Body, one that needs the other members for its own health and effectiveness.

to ecclesiology in ways that I wish to affirm (though not uncritically). Third, all three theologians have interests in theological anthropology, community, and ethics (personal or social justice). However, fourth, all three make proposals that are suggestive but require development, refinement, and/or corrective. Finally, the selection of three theologians from different ecclesial traditions (Lutheran, Pentecostal/Croatian evangelical, and Baptist) allows for a degree of breadth and cross-fertilization which, hopefully, makes the present project accessible and interesting for a broad Protestant audience.

In selecting these three primary conversation partners I wish to affirm at the same time the importance of the entire historic Christian tradition, including the early patristic period (e.g., Athanasius, Irenaeus, the Cappadocians, Augustine), the theologians of the medieval period who continued and developed the patristic tradition (e.g., Anselm, Aquinas, Richard of St. Victor), and the theologians of the Reformation and Great Awakening (e.g., Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Edwards). Though I interact with many of these theologians during the course of the argument (in both the body and the footnotes), I cannot engage them comprehensively given the nature and scope of the present project. This dissertation is primarily an exercise in constructive rather than historical theology, though it does seek to engage historical theology as much as possible as the argument develops. Moreover, Bonhoeffer, Volf, and Grenz are themselves deeply rooted in the historic Christian tradition, hence I engage them consciously as partners in an ongoing theological conversation that both precedes and follows them.

1.   Dietrich Bonhoeffer

As attested by the recent, still ongoing publication of the authoritative English

addition of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Works* (16 vols.) by Fortress Press. Bonhoeffer

continues to intrigue the theological community. Some of his ideas that I intend to

develop further (and sometimes modify) include the *imago Dei* understood relationally as

being-for-others (including freedom *for* others), his corresponding conception of the

church as the *church-for-others* and as the *new humanity*, and his understanding of the

church as an *ethical and formative community*. The unique contribution that Bonhoeffer

brings to the present topic (relative to Volf and Grenz) is his creative and compelling, yet

underdeveloped, integration of theological anthropology, ecclesiology, and ethics/justice.

Moreover, Bonhoeffer contributes a deeply holistic spirituality to the discussion, one that

restores the biblical spirituality of the prophets, being oriented to the reality of God and

thus attentive to the intrinsic connection between genuine spirituality and social justice.

2.   Miroslav Volf

Miroslav Volf has long been interested in understanding what it means to be

human, especially with regard to issues of identity and otherness and their relation to

ethics and church. He explores these issues initially in his award-winning book *Exclusion

and Embrace*. In *After Our Likeness* he broadens and develops his insights further to

apply them to the problem of the church's unity and diversity. *After Our Likeness* is

particularly relevant to the present dissertation because it constructs a trinitarian

ecclesiology for the Free Church tradition (and is ground breaking in this respect). Other

pertinent aspects of Volf's theology include his writings on ethics and justice, his

theology of work and vocation (directly relevant to chapter 6 of the dissertation), and his

theological stress on hope.[31] The unique contribution that Volf makes to the present

dissertation topic is his trinitarian ecclesiology, which he develops through ecumenical

discussion with Ratzinger and Zizioulas and articulates within the confines of Free

Church assumptions and commitments.[32] Volf's trinitarianism is more developed than

Bonhoeffer's and is different from Grenz's in its emphasis on church unity. In addition,

as a theologian who is very intentionally involved in ongoing conversation with others

who hold diverse (and differing) ideas and represent diverse traditions and cultures, Volf

brings a welcome dimension of theological, ecumenical, and geographical breadth to the

discussion.[33]

3.   Stanley Grenz

Before his untimely death in 2005, Stanley Grenz was widely regarded as a

leading evangelical theologian. His many books address a wide variety of issues, some of

which include theological method, the doctrine of the Trinity, ethics, church, culture (and

postmodernity), Baptist ecclesiology, and historical theology.[34] Of particular relevance to

this dissertation are his writings on Trinity and the human person, his development of a

Baptist ecclesiology, and his theological stress on eschatology (learned from his mentor,

Wolfhart Pannenberg). Grenz's unique contribution to the topic includes his emphasis on

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31.   See Volf, *The End of Memory. Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), and *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001).

32.   Volf, a Croatian evangelical and Pentecostal, currently attends an Anglican church.

33.   See Mark Oppenheimer, "Miroslav Volf Spans Conflicting Worlds," *The Christian Century* (January 11, 2003): 18–23.

34.   Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God; Theology; A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); *The Moral Quest. Foundation of Christian Ethics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000); *The Baptist Congregation: A Guide to Baptist Belief and Practice* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1996); and *Reason for Hope: The Systematic Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). See also Stanley J. Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000).

the *imago Dei*, and his construction of a Baptist, trinitarian-communitarian

ecclesiology.[35]

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35.   Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self, Theology*, and *The Baptist Congregation*.

Part I: The Challenge

Chapter 1:
Problems with Defining a Human Person in Contemporary Culture

A.   Current Lack of Precision About the Human Person in Contemporary Culture

1.   Lack of precision about what constitutes a human person

It seems to be immediately evident that the concept of the human person, or the human being, is of utmost importance to the most basic values, beliefs, and commitments of contemporary Western societies. Generally speaking, we attribute great worth and dignity to humans, hence to treat someone *as a human being* is to treat them with the utmost respect. To protect and advocate on behalf of those who are vulnerable, such as minorities, the poor, children, and those who are oppressed or suffering unnecessarily, we appeal to *human rights*, which we usually regard as inalienable and grounded in the inherent worth of human persons.[1] We use words such as *humane* or *humanizing* to describe the kind of caring or empathetic action befitting of human beings in their treatment of other human or non-human creatures. When we speak of *human community* we usually mean something more than mere association or even the cooperation of individuals; we envision human community as something inter-*personal*, involving a higher degree of intimacy, mutual care, and responsibility to and for one another.

Despite this apparent dependence on the concept of the human, there is surprisingly little consensus around and precision about what it actually *means* to be human. In fact, there is growing uncertainty (even cynicism) that a definition is possible

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1.   United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, in *Human Rights Documents Compilation of Documents Pertaining to Human Rights* (Washington: Committee on Foreign Affairs, 1983), 63 (Preamble); Michael J. Perry, *The Idea of Human Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 5; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 312.

or even desirable.[2] Yet without it, such notions as human rights, the humane treatment of others, and human community remain inescapably vague and perhaps even groundless, despite the rhetorical power they presently possess (so a definition of being human does matter). Several factors have contributed to our culture's current anthropological agnosticism, the most significant of which include the problem of the fragmented self, a lack of precision about the *telos* (purpose and destiny) of the human person, the problem of scientific reductionism, and the loss of a theological account situating human persons before God. Exploring these factors will yield a better understanding of the present predicament and its implications for our understanding of and engagement in community and society.

2.   The problem of the fragmented self

According to Stanley Grenz, "no concept has been more important for the understanding of the human person in Western intellectual history than the 'self.'"[3] He notes that contemporary people tend to conceive of the self in terms of inwardness or interiority (i.e., the real self within) and continuity (a sense of personal identity as a

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2.   Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 2; Joel B. Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life: The Nature of Humanity in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 1; Jean Bethke Elshtain, "The Dignity of the Human Person and the Idea of Human Rights: Four Inquiries," *Journal of Law and Religion* 14, no. 1 (1999–2000), 56; Niels Henrik Gregersen, "Varieties of Personhood: Mapping the Issues," In *The Human Person in Science and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 2; James C. Peterson, *Changing Human Nature: Ecology, Ethics, Genes, and God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 217–19; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 12, 60. Many, following thinkers such as Michel Foucault, fear that all attempts to define a human person (whether according to nature, purpose/function, or a transcendent vantage point) lead inevitably to some form of oppression. There are historical precedents that justify this concern, for example Nazi eugenics, however abandoning the effort to understand and articulate what it means to be human is not a satisfying solution. I argue this point in more detail later in this chapter (section B.3).

3.   Stanley J. Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self: Toward a Theology of the Imago Dei in the Postmodern Context," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 24, no. 1 (2002): 34.

unified being).[4] This conception of the self is distinctly modern, and thus relatively

recent, but has a long intellectual history dating back at least to Augustine.[5] Augustine

noticed that his life lacked a unifying center; like a small boat in a tumultuous sea,

Augustine felt himself tossed about by inner moral conflict, competing desires preying on

his impoverished will, and the expectations of other people. To overcome this

fragmentation Augustine turned inward, to God, to find his authentic identity. In

prayerful contemplation he wrote, "Man, this part of your creation, wishes to praise you.

You arouse him to take joy in praising you, for you have made us for yourself. and our

heart is restless until it rests in you."[6] Augustine's reflections, both in content and method

(introspective autobiography), profoundly influenced the trajectory of Western

theological anthropology. For example, drawing on Augustine over a millennium later,

Calvin argued that genuine knowledge of God and genuine knowledge of oneself arise

together.[7] Conversely, to the degree that they are separated, both God-knowledge and

self-knowledge become impoverished and corrupted. The impact of Augustine's inward

turn reached beyond theology, to philosophy and psychology, eventually leading "to the

concept of the self as the stable, abiding reality that constitutes the individual human

being."[8] Grenz charts two trajectories in the development of the modern self leading to

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4. Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 60.

5. Grenz, "The Social God," 35.

6. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 44. As another poignant example of someone turning to God as the source and center of one's true identity in the midst of inner conflict and chaotic life circumstances, see Dietrich Bonhoeffer's poem "Who am I?" Written from his prison cell (Bonhoeffer was imprisoned for his role in the resistance movement against the Nazis), the last line of the poem reads, "Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of mine. Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am Thine!" Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 347–48.

7. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), I.I.1–3 (pp. 37–39).

8. Grenz, "The Social God," 35.

two competing conceptualizations of selfhood in modernity.[9] He calls the first conception the "world-mastering, self-mastering rational self" (or the "therapeutic self") and the second the "self-focused, self-expressive self."[10]

The world-mastering, self-mastering rational self

Grenz's first conception of the self, which he identifies as predominant in modernity, focuses on mastery of self and world. This view envisions individual persons as particular instances of the ideal, universal, rational man. It combines Augustine's turn toward inwardness with an emphasis on the individual rational subject. Grenz traces this latter emphasis back to Boethius, who famously defined the person as "the individual substance of a rational nature."[11] Boethius's definition was dependent upon Aristotle's distinction between substances and accidents, with the implication that 'person' belongs to the realm of unchanging substance or essence rather than the realm of changeable characteristics.[12] Boethius put forth an essentialist view of personhood in which the inner

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9. Linda Woodhead cautions against oversimplifying the modern notion of self by depicting it as something stable and homogeneous. Instead, she offers four conflicting conceptions of the modern self, including the bestowed self, the rational self, the boundless self, and the effective self. See Linda Woodhead, "Theology and the Fragmentation of the Self," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 1 (March 1999): 53–57. Though Grenz offers just two trajectories, his portrayal of the modern self is sufficiently nuanced to avoid this criticism (and actually touches on each of Woodhead's themes though with different terminology). On the other hand, his hard distinction between the modern 'stable' or 'centered' self and the postmodern 'fluid' or 'decentered' self should be qualified. While his distinction accurately describes conceptual differences, it does not account for the complexity of modernity or postmodernity from a historical perspective (i.e., granted conceptual philosophical differences, actual people living within those cultural phases are not ideal types).

10. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self,* 96–97 and "The Social God," 35–38. These correspond to Charles Taylor's two versions of human agency: the self engaged in free, disengaged subjectivity and the self engaged in expressivist self-understanding (*Sources of the Self,* 106).

11. Quoted in Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self,* 65. See also F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 31, 168, 225.

12. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self,* 66.

'essence' of a person is stable and remains unchanged by 'accidental' factors, such as time (or historical development), the body, or relationships.[13]

Later, Enlightenment thinkers built upon this individualist conception of the rational self. Descartes, representing the rationalist stream of Enlightenment thought, conceived of the human person as a thinking substance. For Descartes, a person is an autonomous subject that exercises rationality to gain knowledge through contemplating the universal truths of reason (mathematics being a preeminent discipline).[14] Rather than turning to inwardness as a way of finding oneself in God (as with Augustine), the Cartesian self turns within in order to discover the autonomous power of reason to order the world. Hence Descartes's notorious declaration, "I think therefore I am." Locke, representing the empiricist stream of Enlightenment thought, envisioned the human person as a disengaged self-conscious being that gains knowledge not by contemplating universal rational truths but by objectively employing proper methods to analyze and manipulate empirical data. For Locke, the key property of personhood is self-awareness or self-consciousness, which elevates a person above the level of animal instinct to be a "disengaged subject of rational control."[15] Charles Taylor calls Locke's view of personhood the "punctual" or "neutral" self, since "the self is defined in abstraction from any constitutive concerns," its only constitutive property being self-awareness.[16] Kant's

13. Bonhoeffer calls this conception of personhood 'atomistic', though in Bonhoeffer's context this theory arose from Kant's distinction between the *noumenal* and *phenomenal* realms (one's personal center is a *thing-in-itself* and remains unaffected by social relationships). See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, vol. 1 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 38–40, 252–57.

14. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 70.

15. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 49.

16. Taylor notes that "Locke recognizes that we are not indifferent to ourselves; but he has no inkling of the self as a being which essentially is constituted by a certain mode of self concern—in contrast to the concern we cannot but have about the quality of our experiences as pleasurable or painful" (*Sources of the Self*, 49). See also Gregersen, "Varieties of Personhood," 2.

philosophy added the element of universality to the emerging modern picture of the individual, rational, autonomous, disengaged self. In contrast with empiricism, which held that the mind begins as a blank slate and is passive in the knowing process (the senses are central and formational for the mind), Kant argued for the centrality of the mind as the agent that actively organizes and systematizes raw data provided by the senses.[17] It achieves this through an *a priori* synthesis, a process called transcendental apperception, in which perceived reality is filtered through universal categories of reason already present in the mind, such as space and time. In so doing the mind takes an active role in constructing reality as it is perceived by the knower through rational, universal categories of reason. In light of this, Kant recognized that there must be a distinction between reality itself, which he termed the *noumenal* realm, and reality as we perceive it to be, which he termed the *phenomenal* realm. The implication of this is that the individual knowing subject becomes the center of reality, through which all of reality is mediated and interpreted. This did not imply radical subjectivism (much less relativism) for Kant, because it was the subject's grasp of *universal and objective reason* that Kant emphasized. This leads to radical subjectivism only when a belief in the universality and objectivity of reason is rejected (as in postmodern subjectivism). Moreover, since it operates by using universal categories of reason, which are accessible to all, the individual thinking subject attains universal knowledge of self and world. As Grenz puts it, the self, in knowing itself, thereby knows all selves as well as the structure of any and every possible self.[18]

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17. Hence Kant's understanding of the human person as a pure rational agent (Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 12; Gregersen, "Varieties of Personhood," 3).

18. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 77.

According to Grenz, the Enlightenment's emphasis upon subjectivity and

empiricism affected the later development of the Puritan and Pietist movements, as well

as the evangelical awakenings of the eighteenth century. For example, the Puritans

debated empirical evidences for the assurance of their election.[19] The Pietists emphasized

a religion of the heart, which "shifted the locus of true Christianity from baptism to

personal conversion, from the objective to the subjective, from the external to the

internal, from the rites of the faith community to the divine work within the individual

soul."[20] Carter Lindberg notes, however, that the original Pietist emphasis on interiority

did not lead to passivity and quietism.[21] Early Pietists, such as Philipp Jakob Spener,

emphasized holistic transformation of individuals and society.[22] Evangelicals, who

inherited aspects from both Puritans and Pietists, focused on the centrality of a personal

conversion experience, through which believers gained assurance of their salvation.[23] As

Grenz puts it, "the believing soul not only gains mastery over self but thereby also tests

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19.   See also Carter Lindberg, "Introduction," in *The Pietist Theologians*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 11. Lindberg traces the roots of this development to the Reformed Pietist William Perkins.

20.   Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 81. For the significance of empiricism for John Wesley and the early developing Wesleyan movement, see Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth, 2002), 32–33, 167–69, 383–88. Rack refers to Wesley as a "reasonable enthusiast," being "rational in form but enthusiast in substance." See also F. Dreyer, "Faith and Experience in the Thought of John Wesley," *American Historical Review* 88 (1983): 12–30.

21.   Lindberg, "Introduction," 7. Johannes Wallmann provides a helpful summary statement: "Pietism pressed for the individualization and interiorization of the religious life, developed new forms of personal piety and communal life, led to sweeping reforms in theology and the church, and left profound marks on the social and cultural life of the countries grasped by it." Wallman, *Der Pietismus*, vol. 4/01 of *Die Kirche in ihrer Geschichte* (Göttttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1990), 7. Quoted in Lindberg, "Introduction," 4.

22.   Spener's most famous book, *Pia Desideria* (published in 1675) envisioned the reformation of society through the ongoing reformation of the church. In this work, Spener offered six concrete reform proposals: (1) a more comprehensive use of Scripture by clergy and laity; (2) the establishment and exercise of a lay spiritual priesthood; (3) a stress upon righteous Christian living; (4) better participant conduct in religious controversies; (5) a pious reform of theological education; and (6) the preaching of sermons that would produce faith and its fruits. K. James Stein, "Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705)," in *The Pietist Theologians*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 84–85.

23.   See Timothy Larsen, "Defining and Locating Evangelicalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 10–12.

and knows with certainty the status of being the recipient of God's salvation."[24] In

parallel with the new scientific method's focus on experimentation, eighteenth century

evangelicals often referred to their own approach as "experimental religion," meaning

religious faith tested and proved by experience.[25] This approach, combined with a stress

on growing in holiness (or perfection) fit with the Enlightenment impulse toward self

mastery or improvement and opened the door to what Grenz calls the "self-sufficient,

self-constructing, therapeutic self" of modern psychology.[26] Grenz does not consider

whether the Enlightenment impulse toward self-mastery had deeper roots in the historic

Christian tradition. While the Enlightenment ideal proposed *autonomous* self-mastery,

the notion of *self-development in relationship with God* actually has deep Christian roots,

evident, for example, in the patristic notion of *theosis*. Athanasius articulates the basic

meaning of *theosis* as follows: "For he was made man that we might be made God"

(meaning not that we literally become God but that we are drawn to share in the divine

life, because Christ shared in our humanity).[27]

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24.   Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 85. A classic example is the account of John Wesley's conversion. In 1738, at a meeting in Aldersgate, Wesley experienced a deep, personal encounter with God and suddenly understood the significance of the doctrine of justification by faith for his own life. In his words, "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given to me that had had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death." John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 103.

25.   Speaking of John Wesley, David Hempton writes, "His teaching on experience and assurance, really a complex mixture of Lockean empiricism and the witness of the Spirit, was designed to show that the Christian believer can 'know' that s/he is saved because 'the Spirit witnesses with his spirit that he is a child of God.'" Hempton, "John Wesley (1703–1791)," in *The Pietist Theologians*, ed. Carter Lindberg (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 258. This is part of what is meant by the term 'experimental religion' in the Wesleyan movement (p. 257).

26.   Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 84, 86. The relationship between Pietism and the Enlightenment is complex and not strictly linear in either direction. Carter Lindberg refers to Pietism and Enlightenment as "sibling movements," but stresses that the latter cannot account for the complexity, influence, and spiritual depth of the former. For example, the post-millennial eschatology in Spener's Pietism preceded the Enlightenment's concern for self-improvement. See Lindberg, "Introduction," 12.

27.   Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 54.3, in *NPNF2-04: Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature, 1892), 65. In chapter five, I develop this theme in terms of the basic, created "eschatological openness" of human beings toward God, others, and the future.

Grenz attributes the emergence of the therapeutic self to theorists such as William

James, Eric Fromm, and especially Abraham Maslow.[28] James abandoned transcendental

views of the mind, including its relation to the soul, and instead promoted a functional or

utilitarian understanding that associates mental activity strictly with the selection of

means to attain ends. For James, only actions that show a deliberate choice of means to

accomplish specific goals can properly be called expressions of the mind. Eric Fromm

also stressed a teleological approach to mental activity (connecting means to ends), but

believed that psychologists were mistaken to abandon concepts such as the soul or human

nature. Fromm believed that mental health should help individuals achieve aims that are

not only deliberate, but, more importantly and specifically, serve the fulfilment of human

nature as defined by qualities such as independence, integrity, and the ability to love.

Maslow also believed that psychology should assist people in realizing the full potential

of their inherent human nature. He proposed a hierarchy of needs that moved from basic

or survival needs (e.g., food, shelter, sex) to more abstract, advanced stages of self-

actualization.[29] Essentially, Maslow combined an instrumental approach to rationality

with an essentialist conception of human nature to propose his theory of self-actualization

aided by the therapeutic practice of the psychologist. Significantly, his conception of

essential human nature deliberately rested on biological observations rather than

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28. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self,* 88–96.

29. Maslow's proposal of "self-actualization" or "full-humanness" rested on three assumptions. First, man has an essential nature with biological needs befitting that nature (and these needs are good or neutral, not evil). Second, full health and normal development require the actualization of this nature, but many people encounter obstacles to this or pursue a misconstrued nature. Third, psychology is necessary to uncover and correct the misunderstanding or denial of this essential nature. See Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), 340.

theological or philosophical assumptions. He envisioned the quest for meaning and self-fulfillment as a 'secular' rather than a religious enterprise.[30]

The self-focused, self-expressive self

The second major conception of the self that emerged in modernity is what Grenz calls the "self-focused, self-expressive self." This conception also has roots in Augustine's turn inward, but focuses on individual self-expression rather than self-mastery. It posits a self that is unique and particular, rather than ideal and universal, a "self-focused rather than an essence-focused self."[31] Early representative thinkers, such as Montaigne and Rousseau, were not satisfied with previous attempts to found the self by means of a purported universal human nature. They proposed that human 'nature' is person-specific, thus true self knowledge is attained not by means of a detached scientific method but by contemplating one's thoughts and feelings through introspection and autobiography. According to Rousseau, the foundational orientation of the human person is toward self-preservation. The passions (including love) arise out of and function to preserve the self. Since Rousseau regards the inner nature of the person as essentially good, the purpose of introspection is not to master the self in accordance with an external standard but to discover the goodness already present within and bring it to explicit expression. The goal is increasingly to be oneself. [32]

The Romantic Movement built upon the legacy of Rousseau's emphases on introspection and the uniqueness of the individual, but also aimed for universality

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30. By 'secular,' I am referring here to the modern notion of the 'secular' sphere in distinction and autonomy from the 'sacred' sphere. However, to anticipate what I will argue later in chapters four and seven (which emphasize rational and incarnational cultural engagement), from a Christian perspective the 'secular' has renewed significance and integrity in light of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

31. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 100.

32. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 103–9.

through the individual person's intuition of being connected with the wholeness of

reality. Romanticism involved a quasi-religious awareness of an energy, presence, or

'cosmic self' animating the world and every creature within it. For example, Emerson

conceived of God as a dynamic mover of the cosmos, an 'Over-Soul' present within the

human mind as all-embracing, transcendent Reason. Correspondingly, he viewed other

people as lenses though which a person reads her own mind. In light of this, he saw the

self not as a static reality but a continuing goal to be attained.[33] Similar ideas were

expressed within an explicitly theistic framework, as for example with Schleiermacher's

stress on "feeling," described as God-consciousness, absolute dependence, a "sense and

taste for the infinite," and an intuition of "the unity of all things."[34] The Romantic

Movement thus retained the Enlightenment's ideal of a centered self, but construed it as a

self-expressing rather than a self-mastering centered self.[35] This self had its basis in the

Romantic idea of the infinite within the finite, which gave it both a sense of continuity

and a capacity to transcend its own particularity to achieve new possibilities.

The fragmentation of the self

The Romantic idea of the infinite within the finite was too unstable a center to

sustain the self-expressing self.[36] It took for granted the Kantian distinction between

noumena and *phenomena* and was vulnerable to the criticisms of philosophers such as

Fichte and Schopenhauer. Fichte rejected Kant's *noumenal* realm of universal categories

that structure the mind and focused instead on the thinking 'I' as the ground of its own

consciousness and knowledge. Accordingly, Fichte defined the 'I' as the self that

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33. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 114.
34. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1994), 7, 36, 39, 45, 77, 141, 237.
35. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 12.
36. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 118.

apprehends and thereby posits itself. Curtis Bowman explains that Fichte's self "is not a

static thing with fixed properties, but rather a self-producing process," which implies that

"it must be free, since in some as yet unspecified fashion it owes its existence to nothing

but itself."[37] As a free act, this self-positing requires the deliberate exercise of the will.[38]

Thus, while Kant attributes the perceiving and organizing of reality to the structures of

the unconscious mind (beyond experience), Fichte attributes this process to the will.

Schopenhauer accepted Fichte's emphasis on the will but made the innovative claim that

the will is nonrational, arational, or irrational (whereas both Fichte and Kant viewed the

will as rational). This move infused a degree of arbitrariness or meaninglessness into

reality (because it is reconstructed by an irrational will). Nietzsche took Schopenhauer's

claim a step further and argued that since all human claims to knowledge, truth, and

moral values are meaningless and groundless, they are really just veiled assertions of the

will to power. As Nietzsche put it, "A living thing seeks above all to *discharge* its

strength—life itself is *Will to Power*."[39] In light of this, Nietzsche celebrated ambitious

self-assertion and deplored the Judeo-Christian tradition's emphasis on humility and its

ethic of empathy and responsibility for the weak, the poor, and the destitute.[40]

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37.   Curtis Bowman, "Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814)," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, D, para. 1, online: http://www.iep.utm.edu/fichtejg/

38.   Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 118–22.

39.   Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (Mineolo: Dover, 1997), 10 (emphasis original).

40.   Nietzsche writes, "To demand of strength that it *not* express itself as strength, that it *not* be a desire to overwhelm, a desire to cast down, a desire to become lord, a thirst for enemies and resistances and triumphs, is just as nonsensical as to demand of weakness that it express itself as strength." Nietzsche then goes on to exalt the Romans as most noble and strong and to castigate the Jews as being a weak "priestly people of *ressentiment* par excellence" (emphasis original). *On the Genealogy of Morals*, quoted from Robert C. Solomon, *Existentialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 82–3. See also Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 13.

Grenz traces the last stage of the fragmentation of the self through the structuralist, post-structuralist, and postmodern movements.[41] Saussure's structuralism maintained that a universal cultural system structures human mental processes and is evident in language and social institutions. It regarded modern ideas of selfhood as social constructs that influence and form the self, which has no control over the process. Grenz explains, "Similar to the unit of language, the individual (of whose mind language is the highest expression) is essentially a structure of intersecting relations. Like a linguistic expression, the self finds identity only through its place in the larger system."[42] This reflects Saussure's linguistic insight that meaning must be understood by analyzing not just individual words but the underlying structure of the whole language. The implication of the stucturalist perspective is that personal identity and selfhood can be understood only by analyzing the underlying societal structures in which the person is situated. Poststructuralists agreed that human persons are the products of underlying social structures, but denied that these structures were inherent to a universal human condition. Michel Foucault, for instance, worried that his predecessors elevated universality and homogeneity at the expense of suppressing difference or otherness. Following Nietzsche, Foucault abandoned all pretence of objectivity and devoted his attention to the particular and different rather than the general and universal. One of the most significant universals that Foucault sought to undermine was the concept of human nature, which he claimed was nothing other than the projection of social norms and influences that had been unconsciously internalized. In so doing, he was able to posit the death of the self

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41. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 129–36.
42. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 129. Similarly, Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology envisioned the human person as the product of genetics, language, and culture-bound education.

(dissolved into the structures of society) as an extension of Nietzsche's analogy of the death of God.[43] Following Foucault, the postmodern ethos celebrates this demise of the self, believing that the modernist search for the true self, along with its emphasis on unity and self-mastery, was at best illusory and at worst oppressive. No longer seen as an agent of subjectivity over-against real objects, the postmodern self is a self-referential system. This self is highly de-centered and fluid, finding its identity in its various relationships and interests. Lacking stability and continuity, one could potentially have as many 'selves' as the number of social groups to which one belongs (professional, recreational, religious, virtual, etc.). In short, the self of postmodernity is an arbitrary bundle of fluctuating relationships, preferences, and expressions, with no transcendent reference point beyond the cultural web to anchor ultimate meaning.[44]

3.   The lack of precision about the *telos* or purpose of the human person

In order for human beings to make sense of their world, to orient themselves and make meaningful life decisions within it, they inevitably rely on what Charles Taylor calls 'frameworks.'[45] A framework is "that in virtue of which we make sense of our lives spiritually. Not to have a framework is to fall into a life which is spiritually senseless."[46] Much like the concept of a worldview, a framework provides a "background picture" or "ontological account" of one's basic intuitions and assumptions about the world and the meaning of life.[47] As such, it is the source of a person's ultimate values and

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43.   Grenz, "The Social God," 40.
44.   Taylor observes that a sense of meaninglessness defines the present age (*Sources of the Self*, 18).
45.   Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 3–24.
46.   Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 18.
47.   Taylor prefers to speak of what he calls "social imaginaries" rather than worldviews. His point is that the term 'worldview' tends to prioritize intellect and theory whereas "social imaginary" emphasizes that our vision of the world is itself embodied within traditions, rituals, symbols, and narratives. Thus, for Taylor, the social imaginary is a more holistic, integrative notion than worldview.

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commitments.[48] Frameworks often operate implicitly in our reasoning and decision making, even if we remain unaware of their existence or are unable to articulate them explicitly. Crucial to any framework is a set of what Taylor calls "qualitative distinctions," which are basic value distinctions enabling moral and practical judgment. Taylor explains, "To think, feel, judge within such a framework is to function with the sense that some action, or mode of life, or mode of feeling is incomparably higher than others which are more readily available to us."[49] The precise nature of the value distinctions vary; one might perceive a decision or course of action as being fuller, or purer, or deeper, or more admirable, or truer (having an absolute claim over other relative ones) than alternatives. The point is that these basic value distinctions exist and structure our ways of seeing and judging. Taylor argues that such basic values are "incomparably higher" because they stand independent of our own desires and preferences as standards by which these are evaluated. They are "incomparable" in the sense that they cannot be measured quantitatively on the same scale as other ends and goods; they are qualitatively and definitively superior.

Frameworks are essential to human personhood for at least three reasons. First, as mentioned above, they provide the background assumptions (explicit or implicit) that enable our moral judgments and intuitions. As Taylor explains it,

> To articulate a framework is to explicate what makes sense of our moral responses. That is, when we try to spell out what it is that we presuppose when we judge that a certain form of life is truly worthwhile, or place our dignity in a certain achievement or status, or define our moral obligations in a certain

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48. Examples of frameworks that Taylor provides include the honour ethic (ancient warrior or citizen-soldier), self-mastery through reason (rationalism), vision and expressive power (Romanticism), and naturalist reductionism (*Sources of the Self*, 20–22).

49. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 19.

manner, we find ourselves articulating *inter alia* what I have been calling here 'frameworks.'[50]

Second, frameworks are constitutive of human identity and agency.[51] The question "who am I?" cannot be answered adequately simply by stating one's name and genealogy. A meaningful answer requires knowledge of one's deepest commitments and identifications (Taylor's "qualitative distinctions," which he also speaks of as "defining orientations"). Frameworks are formative for personal identity because they provide the stable background structures through which one can determine where one stands concerning what is good, valuable, worthwhile, or admirable and from which one can make sensible decisions.[52] Accordingly, the disruption of one's framework leads to a crisis of identity, a sense of losing oneself resulting from confusion over or inability to define what is ultimately significant and meaningful. Third, frameworks are necessary because human beings cannot function without some orientation toward the good. As Taylor puts it, "we are only selves insofar as we move in a certain space of questions, as we seek and find an orientation to the good."[53] Religious frameworks define "the good" in relation to God or some other notion of transcendent, ultimate reality, while secular frameworks offer definitions according to strictly historical (and typically modern) principles, such as the struggle between good and evil, or progress and reaction, or socialism and exploitation.[54] The salient point is that an orientation to the good, which is necessary for human personhood, requires both a framework that defines it (implicitly or explicitly) and a commitment on the part of the agent to move toward it. For example, if one's framework

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50. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 26.
51. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 27.
52. Taylor writes, "it belongs to human agency to exist in a space of questions about strongly valued goods, prior to all choice or adventitious cultural change" (*Sources of the Self*, 31).
53. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 34; see also pp. 41–45.
54. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 45.

is defined by a modern narrative of progress, one might envision "the good" as overcoming the limits of nature or the social boundaries of particular traditions to achieve the goal of self mastery and independence, accountable only to universal reason. One might then reject religious commitments, which are perceived as arising within particular communities and having a tendency to venerate the past.

As Alasdair MacIntyre has convincingly demonstrated, the notion of being orientated toward the good corresponds with a teleological view of the human person, in which human beings are seen to possess a specific nature with certain aims and goals that move them toward a specific *telos*.[55] The end or *telos* need not be defined too narrowly, as if the purpose and destiny of human beings could be reduced to a single rational principle (e.g., freedom) or calculated as the best outcome for the greatest number of people (as in consequentialism). To avoid such reductionism, a teleological approach must offer a "thick description" of human life, which takes into account the role of frameworks or worldviews, as well as the social, cultural, and linguistic situatedness of human existence.[56] Moreover, the human *telos* should not be defined in essentialist terms, depicting human nature as something static or fully predetermined, whether genetically or socially.[57] On the contrary, it should account for the historical nature of human existence, that human beings find their identity and make meaningful choices in the present, having been formed in the past and in anticipation of the future. Human persons discover their

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55. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 148.

56. The term "thick description" comes from Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic, 1973), 3–30.

57. James C. Peterson, *Genetic Turning Points The Ethics of Human Genetic Intervention* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2001), 283–84. Elsewhere Peterson writes, "The telos is not a set image of what human beings already are or should be, but rather one to be discovered, one that changes and develops as human beings change and develop" (*Changing Human Nature*, 88). See also Elshtain, "The Dignity of the Human Person," 56–57.

identity and purpose through an ongoing process of being and becoming. As Alasdair

MacIntyre puts it, to be oriented toward the human *telos* is "to find oneself placed at a

certain point on a journey with set goals; to move through life is to make progress – or to

fail to make progress – toward a given end."[58] Thus, a human life directed toward the

human *telos* is characterized by both continuity and development, which are held together

in what MacIntyre calls "the unity of a narrative quest."[59]

Contemporary culture largely rejects the idea that human persons have a specific

telos. This rejection has roots in the Enlightenment and developed in two trajectories. The

first trajectory goes back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when, according to

MacIntyre, several thinkers in England and France transferred the scientific conceptual

framework of physics to their understanding of human nature and behaviour, including

the overarching view that all of reality is governed by natural physical laws.[60] To achieve

scientific credibility, such thinkers purged the human sciences of all speculative

references to human intentions, purposes, and reasons for actions, because such

references presupposed the centrality of the beliefs of the human agents—and beliefs

were not properly the subject matter of scientific inquiry.[61] This led eventually to a

reductionist understanding of the human person in the social sciences, which claimed the

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58. MacIntyre. *After Virtue*. 34.

59. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 219. Hauerwas puts it like this: "To be historic means that I must be capable of making a succession of 'events' a narrative – not just any narrative, but a narrative that is sufficient to give me a sense of self, one which looks not only to my past but points to the future, thereby giving my life a telos and direction." Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 36.

60. MacIntyre. *After Virtue*. 83.

61. MacIntyre. *After Virtue*. 80–83. MacIntyre writes, "The notion of 'fact' with respect to human beings is thus transformed in the transition from the Aristotelian to the mechanist view. On the former view human action, because it is to be explained teleologically, not only can, but must be, characterized with reference to the hierarchy of goods which provide the ends of human action. On the latter view human action not only can, but must be. characterized without any reference to such goods. On the former view the facts about human action included the facts about what is valuable to human beings (and *not* just the facts about what they think to be valuable); on the latter view there are no facts about what is valuable." (p. 84)

ability to explain and predict human behaviour on the basis of pseudo-scientific, law-like

generalizations.[62] We will return to the problem of reductionism shortly (see below). The

second trajectory is rooted in the philosophical struggle to free the human person from

the confines of essentialism and Idealism, a struggle exemplified by existentialist thinkers

such as Jean Paul Sartre. Existentialists sought to refute the tendency of traditional

philosophy, from Plato through to Hegel, to give precedence to essence over existence.[63]

In contrast, Sartre, taking an explicitly atheistic viewpoint, argued that if God or Ultimate

Being or The Good does not exist, then human nature, identity, and purpose cannot be

determined by metaphysical or theological concepts. They must be derived solely from

human existence as human self-creation.[64] Actually, for Sartre, strictly speaking there is

no such thing as human nature, since there is no God to conceive it. Human beings are

free to determine their own identities, purposes, values, and goals.[65] As Sartre puts it,

"Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself."[66] Without recourse to a normative

human *telos*, human beings are free to create their own values.

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62. For MacIntyre's narration and critique of this development in the social sciences, see *After Virtue*, 88–107. His treatment is constructive, not merely critical, in that he proposes what he regards as the legitimate generalizations of social scientific research. Specifically, he formulates the following conclusions: (1) while based on research, the inductively-founded character of such generalizations will appear in their failure to approach law-likeness; (2) the best of them may have to coexist with counter-examples they cannot explain; (3) it will be impossible to fully determine their scope; and (4) the role of contingency, leading to a degree of unpredictability, cannot be eliminated from social scientific generalizations (p. 107).

63. See, for example: Simone De Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citidel Press; Kensington Publishing, 1948), 44–51, 128–30; Christine Daigle, ed., *Existentialist Thinkers and Ethics* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2006), 6–8; Nino Langiulli, "Two Cheers for Existentialism," *Logos A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 7, no. 4 (2004): 95–96; Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, x, 10, 55–70; Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, chapters 2–3.

64. Sartre, *Existentialism*, 15.

65. Sartre writes, "If existence really does precede essence, there is no explaining things away by reference to a fixed and given human nature. In other words, there is no determinism, man is free, man is freedom" (*Existentialism*, 21–2).

66. Sartre, *Existentialism*, 15.

Corresponding to this rejection of teleological approaches to human personhood is

the rejection of the frameworks or over-arching narratives that define "the good" and our

relation to it. Premodern societies generally viewed individual human persons within a

broader context of social groups and corresponding roles. A religious worldview,

sustained by the stories, rituals, and traditions of particular communities, undergirded

these groups and roles by integrating the structure of the cosmos and the place of humans

within it. Enlightenment thinkers attempted to redefine human nature according to strictly

rational and objective foundations (pure reason or empirical observation) without

reference to religion or tradition. Post-Enlightenment thinkers, in turn, uncovered the

hidden assumptions and values implicit within these purportedly rational and objective

foundations, which their predecessors took for granted. While they largely accepted the

Enlightenment critique of premodern worldviews as being superstitious, mythical, and

unscientific, post-Enlightenment critics exposed their forebears' own dependence on

modern but equally mythical (because not based on pure reason or empirical data)

underlying assumptions, beliefs, and grand narratives about the nature and purpose of the

world and of human beings. Rather than attempting to replace these with even more

objective and universal foundations, postmodern perspectives embraced the demise of all

'foundations' and grand narratives, emphasizing instead the particular, contextual,

heterogeneous, and interpretive quality of all human knowledge, experience, and

conceptions of meaning and purpose.[67] The ensuing postmodern ethos became radically

individualistic, rejecting not only the holistic or integrated worldviews of traditional

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67. Hence Lyotard's famous depiction of the postmodern condition as "incredulity toward metanarratives." Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

societies but also the qualified individualism of modernity.[68] Lacking a common *telos*, each individual must invent her own story about the meaning of life as well as her own purpose and destiny within it. When one considers the religious and cultural pluralism, moral relativism, and unrestrained consumerism of contemporary liberal democracies, this individualism becomes even more pronounced. Consequently, as Stanley Hauerwas argues, the only common story we share in contemporary liberal culture is that *we have no story* except that which we choose for ourselves. The situation is deeply ironic and disturbingly self-deceptive, because the untold story *that we have no story* subversively impacts our values, judgments, and aspirations, lending credence (in a manner that is existentially powerful but rationally incoherent) to contemporary ideals such as tolerance, pluralism, and personal autonomy.[69] As Hauerwas observes, "The story that liberalism teaches us is that we have no story, and as a result we fail to notice how deeply that story determines our lives."[70]

4.   The problem of scientific reductionism

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the human sciences began to discuss human existence by borrowing from the conceptual framework of the physical sciences. In so doing, they purged their inquiries of all considerations of human beliefs, intentions, and purposes, which were not considered to be the proper domain of the 'hard'

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68.   While some strands of modernity prioritized the individual (e.g., Western, democratic societies), others emphasised the collective (e.g., North-eastern communist countries). Moreover, even those that emphasized the individual aspired to universality and often envisioned the human race as being united by a common metanarrative, such as a collective journey toward freedom, or scientific and technological progress, or the recognition of universal human rights, or the vision of world peace and a united human family. In contrast, postmodernity emphasizes the individual while rejecting all such metanarratives.

69.   James Logan, "Liberalism, Race, and Stanley Hauerwas," *Cross Currents* 55 (Winter 2006): 523.

70.   Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character. Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 84.

sciences.[71] This began a trend that led gradually to various reductionist conceptions of human personhood and existence.[72] For example, in psychology Freud conceptualized "a kind of natural science of the mind," which focused not on questions of agency but on the mechanism underlying personality formation (which he termed 'identification').[73] B. F. Skinner's behaviourism, indebted to empiricist epistemology, viewed the person as a blank slate whose personality and behaviour are shaped through operant conditioning. Skinner appealed to the mechanism of operant conditioning to explain and offer solutions to a wide range of human experiences and problems (through a 'technology of behaviour'), including language acquisition, education, politics, and culture.[74] In the 1970s, the sociobiology movement sought to account for human social behaviour purely on the basis of biology. As it developed, its scope expanded toward explaining all of human behaviour according to biological natural selection.[75] In extreme cases it reduced complex human subjects to simplistic evolutionary mechanisms, for example Michael Ruse's depiction of morality as "a collective illusion foisted upon us by our genes."[76] Reductionism also had an impact on the study of religion, as university religious studies departments sought to objectify religion by discussing it purely in descriptive, historical

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71. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 80–83.

72. While such reductionism has particularly devastating implications for the humanities, it also has a detrimental effect on higher education as a whole. Originally, universities were founded to serve the betterment of society by cultivating exemplary human beings, who were good citizens of character, wisdom, and discernment. In contrast, the contemporary university lacks a deep sense purpose and holism (evidenced by disciplinary fragmentation). Devoid of any underlying shared foundation, universities are increasingly adopting a consumerist approach to education. See Norman Klassen and Jens Zimmermann, *The Passionate Intellect. Incarnational Humanism and the Future of University Education* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 14–15.

73. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 446–47; Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 125–26.

74. Louis M. Smith, "B. F. Skinner," *Prospects* XXIV, no. 3/4 (1994), accessed online: http://www.ibe.unesco.org/publications/ThinkersPdf/skinnere.PDF, pp. 3–7.

75. Richard Joyce, *The Evolution of Morality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 4–5.

76. Michael Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously. A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 253.

terms, as opposed to making constructive theological proposals or evaluating religious truth claims.[77] A similar trend is observable in the field of biblical studies, as scholars focused on 'scientific' approaches to biblical interpretation (e.g., the historical critical method) and began to prioritize method and historical detail over theological output.[78] These scholars emphasized the objectivity and detachment of the interpretive task, which the interpreter conducted by employing 'objective' analytical methods of grammatical, textual, and historical analysis.[79] Such interpreters tended to distrust or even disown the role of faith, doctrine, and tradition, which they considered to be too subjective and more likely to distort the text than to clarify it.[80]

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77. George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 22.

78. As N. T. Wright quips, "many systematic theologians . . . have become impatient with waiting for the mountains of historical footnotes to give birth to the mouse of theological insight." N. T. Wright, "The Letter to the Galatians: Exegesis and Theology," in *Between Two Horizons· Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 206.

79. R. R. Reno, "Series Preface," in *Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible· Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 12–14. See also Stanley E. Porter, "The Future of Theology and Religious Studies from a Confessional Standpoint," *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 11 (2009–10): 123–29.

80. This trend in biblical theology can be traced back to J. P. Gabler, who in his inaugural lecture at the University of Altdorf in 1787 distinguished between biblical and systematic theology as co-existing yet separate disciplines. (See Johann P. Gabler, "An Oration on the Proper Distinction Between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology and the Specific Objectives of Each." in *Old Testament Theology. Flowering and Future* [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004], 501–6). For Gabler, biblical theology is a descriptive, historical undertaking. It seeks to uncover the thought of the biblical authors, by isolating and abstracting the trans-historical truths contained in their writings from their historically conditioned expression. Once this is accomplished, the ideas of particular authors can be analyzed and compared with those of other authors, and then the themes of various eras (i.e., Old and New Testaments) are analyzed and compared. In contrast, systematic theology is a didactic, prescriptive enterprise. Its task is to articulate for the present age the timeless, normative truths discovered by biblical theology. To accomplish this, a theologian "philosophises rationally about divine things, according to the measure of his ability or of the times, age, place, sect, school, and other similar factors" (Gabler, "Oration." 501). For more on this development, see: Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Relationship Between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology," *Trinity Journal* 5 NS (1984): 113–27; B. C. Ollenburger, "Biblical Theology: Situating the Discipline," in *Understanding the Word· Essays in Honour of Bernard W. Andersen* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 37–62; and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Exegesis and Hermeneutics," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Leicester/Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 52–64.

By contrast, R. R. Reno (the series editor of the *Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible*) argues that "doctrine provides structure and cogency to scriptural interpretation" ("Series Preface," 12).

A common problematic feature of scientific reductionist perspectives is that they deny altogether the necessity of frameworks, as well as the importance of narrative contextualization or "thick description" to account for the wholeness of reality.[81] Instead, they attempt to explain reality on the basis of single principle, method, or discipline. Donald MacKay refers to such reductionism as "nothing buttery," since a phenomenon is described as "nothing but" a manifestation of some elemental part (e.g., human love is nothing but chemical reactions in the brain).[82] However, reality is complex, multi-layered, and thus irreducible to some elemental part. Of course, scientific explanations themselves are not problematic; they only become so when they claim to explain human existence *comprehensively*. Human life simply cannot be described comprehensively from the point of view of physics alone. James Peterson provides an insightful analogy to stress this point.[83] While a physicist might identify an instance of a molecule movement, a chemist might observe that this movement can further be explained as glucose converting to lactic acid to generate ATP. A biochemist might then describe the event as being part of the contraction and release of a particular muscle. Next, a physiologist adds another layer by noticing that the muscle is increasing the tension within a human vocal chord. Then, a neurologist clarifies that a deliberate attempt is being made to produce sound, namely a musical note. If a musician was on the scene, she would recognize the

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81. Taylor, *Sources of the Self.* 30–31, 59–60. Worse than being reductionist, such accounts can even lead to a pathological view of the human person. In response to the hypothetical possibility of a person operating without frameworks, Taylor asserts: "Such a person wouldn't know where he stood on issues of fundamental importance, would have no orientation in these issues whatever, wouldn't be able to answer for himself on them. If one wants to add to the portrait by saying that the person doesn't suffer this absence of frameworks as a lack, isn't in other words in a crisis at all, then one rather has a picture of frightening dissociation. In practice, we would see such a person as deeply disturbed." (p. 31)

82. Donald M. MacKay, *Human Science and Human Dignity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 27, 48.

83. I have borrowed and paraphrased the following analogy from Peterson, *Genetic Turning Points*, 32.

sound as singing, because the person is performing a piece from an oratorio called *The Messiah*. Her singing may, in turn, be described from an economic perspective, because the singer is a professional musician being paid to perform. But then a sociologist suggests that something larger is taking place, because the singer is performing with a choir and derives meaning and fulfilment from her relationships with other people in the choir. Finally, a theologian observes that she is singing sacred music and that the whole exercise is deeply spiritual, being situated within the singer's personal faith in God.

The illustration demonstrates both the power and limits of scientific explanation. While reductionist accounts should be rejected because they distort our picture of the interconnected wholeness of reality, non-reductive scientific insights and perspectives are helpful and welcome as we seek to understand human nature and personhood. In the latter approach both nature and nurture are crucial to the formation and development of personhood, hence the human person "emerges as a result of the *interference* between the biological roots of human personhood and the cultural nexus of which any human person is part."[84] Unfortunately, many traditional ontological accounts (theological or otherwise) do not sufficiently accommodate the valid contributions of recent scientific discoveries.[85] For example, conceptions of human personhood that qualitatively distinguish humans from animals on the basis of their possession of some innate capacity (e.g., reasoning, emotion, etc.) are increasingly proving to be untenable.[86] As another example, conceptions of personhood that are based on metaphysical dualisms are giving way to

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84. Gregersen, "Varieties of Personhood," 6–7; cf. Seybold, Kevin S. Seybold, "Biology of Spirituality," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 62 (June 2010): 90–94.

85. Gregerson also faults personalist and existentialist philosophies of the human person for bypassing insights from the natural sciences ("Varieties of Personhood," 7).

86. Green, *Body, Soul, and Human Life*, 46, 65; Peterson, *Changing Human Nature*, 20. Many contemporary theological proposals distinguish humans from animals not on the basis of unique innate capacities but on the basis of a.unique relationship with the Creator leading to a unique vocation or calling.

more integrative theories (e.g., mind–body versus holistic or non-reductive physicalism).[87] According to D. Gareth Jones, "The old distinctions between brain, mind, and soul appear, at best, quaint and, at worst, a hindrance to understanding the human condition."[88] More recent theories identifying complex neural processes and integrating mechanisms, such as supervenience, emergence, and top-down causation, are helping scientists to transcend the now obsolete dichotomous choice between dualist and reductive materialist views of human nature.[89] A third example is that scientific advancements in our understanding of human evolution and genetic mutation have undermined essentialist views of the human person, which conceive of human nature as something static or fixed (e.g., Idealistic views rejected by existentialist thinkers such as Sartre and De Beauvoir).[90] In contrast, human nature is dynamic and changing.[91] Paradoxically, developing and improving one's nature *is part of human nature*. As James Peterson puts it, "human nature is constantly changing and, consciously or not, we play a role in what we become."[92] In sum, advancements in neurology, physiology, biology, and other relevant sciences should inform our understanding of human personhood. Both the

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87. Paul N. Markham, *Rewired: Exploring Religious Conversion* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2007), 103–4; Paul Moes, "Minding Emotions: The Embodied Nature of Emotional Self-Regulation," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 62 (June 2010): 75, 84–85; Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 175–88.

88. D. Gareth Jones, "Peering into People's Brains: Neuroscience's Intrusion into Our Inner Sanctum," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 62 (June 2010): 123.

89. Niels Henrik Gregersen, "God's Public Traffic: Holist Versus Physicalist Supervenience," in *The Human Person in Science and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 153–57; Philip Hefner, "Imago Dei: The Possibility and Necessity of the Human Person," In *The Human Person in Science and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 75–76; Markham, *Rewired*, 109–21; Peterson, *Changing Human Nature*, 22, 172 n.4.

90. Peterson explains, "If we are convinced that evolution has adapted humanity so far, then the very nature of humanity is to continue to change and adapt to an environment quite different from that in the past" (*Changing Human Nature*, 119). See also Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press/Simon & Schuster, 2006) and Denis O. Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008).

91. Peterson, *Changing Human Nature*, 81–82, 88–89, 101, 119, 127.

92. Peterson, *Changing Human Nature*, 101. See also pp. 10, 32, 54.

natural and human sciences are relevant to the discussion. Ignoring one in favour of the other inevitably leads to a distorted picture of human personhood resting on false dichotomies and polarizing arguments. Indeed, reductionist perspectives often arise as an overreaction to essentialism and metaphysical dualism; likewise, Idealist and metaphysical dualist perspectives often arise as an overreaction to naturalistic materialism.

5.   Loss of a theological account situating human persons before God

However one assesses the merits of religion or its place in contemporary public life, it is difficult to deny that, at least in Western democratic countries, the Christian religion has provided a sense of stability to the concept of human personhood. Its doctrine of humanity made in the image of God played a crucial role in grounding the uniqueness and intrinsic value of human beings before God.[93] The doctrines of incarnation and resurrection strongly affirmed bodily existence and material reality as inherently good (though fallen and then redeemed).[94] The doctrine of the Trinity contributed a relational and dynamic view of human personhood and community.[95] The bookending doctrines of creation and eschatology promoted a non-reductive, non-

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93.   Agnes Cunningham, Donald Miller, and James E. Will, "Toward an Ecumenical Theology for Grounding Human Rights," *Soundings* 67 (Summer 1984): 213–14; Elshtain, "The Dignity of the Human Person," 63; Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity. Political Theology and Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), 10, 23, 25; Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 94–95, 341–52 (Wolterstorff argues that the doctrine of *imago Dei* contributes to the grounding human rights, though by itself it is not fully adequate to do so).

94.   Peterson, *Changing Human Nature*, 47–48, 65–66; N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope. Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 149, 210, 221. Wright elsewhere states "The early Christians saw Jesus' resurrection as the action of the creator god to reaffirm the essential goodness of creation and, in an initial and representative act of new creation . . . through which the whole new creation could now come to birth." See N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 729–30.

95.   Michael Novak, "The Judeo-Christian Foundation of Human Dignity, Personal Liberty, and the Concept of the Person," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 1 (October 1998): 114–15; T. F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God One Being Three Persons* (New York: T & T Clark), 1996, 102, 160; John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 34–40.

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essentialist, teleological, historical framework that provided a sense of purpose, vocation, and destiny to human existence.[96] In sum, variations of the Christian vision have profoundly, though often subtly or even unconsciously, shaped the basic values and beliefs of Western civilizations.[97] Even Richard Rorty, a critic of Christianity, acknowledged the formational contribution that the Christian view of personhood bestowed to Western culture, a contribution which grounded notions of human dignity and respect as well as the formulation of human rights. Despite this observation, however, Rorty believed that since such values and rights are already firmly established in our present culture, we presently can and should dispense with our 'outmoded' Christian heritage, particularly its doctrines and traditions.[98] Many others have expressed similar sentiments concerning other contributions of the Christian heritage, such as the emergence of science, democracy, capitalism, the abolishment of slavery, and the struggle for social and global justice.[99] The reigning contemporary posture seems to be: granted, Christianity played an important role in establishing and promoting modern views of personhood along with corresponding societal values, but in our present pluralistic context it is in our collective best interest to retain the kernel (human personhood, freedom, worth, autonomy, etc.) but dispense with the religious shell.

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96. Cunningham et al., "Toward an Ecumenical Theology," 221–22; Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 236–42.

97. In section two I explicate these themes in much greater detail.

98. See Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 320–21, 391.

99. For the formative role Christianity played in these, see for example: Rodney Stark, *The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York: Random House, 2005) and *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Novak, "The Judeo-Christian Foundation of Human Dignity," 107.

Contemporary people want to hold on to a remnant of traditional moral values, but without accepting any transcendent basis for those values.[100]

The societal transformation of religious statements and doctrines into secular sentiments and ideologies has its theological and epistemological roots in a process that began with Kant and culminated with Feuerbach (with implications developed by thinkers such as Freud and Marx). According to Kant, concepts such as God, freedom, and human personhood lie outside the bounds of reason; they exist only in the unknowable noumenal realm beyond the phenomenal realm of human sense perception. Despite this separation of noumena and phenomena, Kant preserved one window or access point into the noumenal world, namely morality. Morality provides such a window because its essence is unexplainable and yet it is somehow knowable to all. The universal experience of morality points to the existence of a universal moral law, which implies a Lawgiver. Kant writes, "Morality thus leads ineluctably to religion, through which it extends itself to the idea of a powerful moral Lawgiver, outside of mankind, for Whose will that is the final end (of creation) which at the same time can and ought to be man's final end."[101] In this move, Kant reversed the traditional theological method of founding morality upon the existence of God and God's character, purposes, and revealed will. For Kant, God is not the epistemological foundation of ethics but the *postulate* of ethics.[102]

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100. Mark A. Noll, "What Happened to Christian Canada?" *Church History* 75 (June 2006): 261. Commenting on the Canadian context, Noll observes, "The social cohesion that the churches once provided is now offered by political and economic loyalties or by ideologies of toleration, personal growth, and multiculturalism." Noll comments that in the case of the United Church (the largest Canadian denomination), a modernized social gospel resonated with its members but left the denomination with little to offer by way of specific Christian content. This, when combined with the government's increasing activity in providing social services and welfare, left the United Church without a unique mission.

101. Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 5–6.

102. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 157–67.

Knowledge of God does not determine knowledge of ethics; rather, knowledge of ethics

determines (and limits) our knowledge of God.[103] Schleiermacher subsequently rejected

Kant's restriction of religious knowledge to morality as being lifeless and dull: "It is as if

a religion had no pulse, no vasculary [sic] system, no circulation, and so had no heat, no

assimilative power."[104] Furthermore, he argued that such a view of religion does not

sufficiently account for human experience, because it does not consider all areas of life.

For example, artwork does not really fall under the category of moral or immoral and yet

art can be good and praiseworthy. Even so, Schleiermacher accepted Kant's

epistemological inversion and took it a step further by locating knowledge and awareness

of God directly within the religious perception of the individual (the Romantic notion of

'feeling'). For Schleiermacher, God is the infinite Whole and true religion is the

individual's sense and taste of the infinite or her perception of the unity of all things. In

Hegel, God is identified with human beings even more. Hegel sought to resolve the

Kantian divide by means of a synthesis, in which the phenomenal world is gradually

absorbed into the noumenal. This occurs through a process of historical necessity, in

which the Infinite, Universal, and Eternal (God) temporarily becomes finite, particular,

and historical, only to be subsequently re-absorbed in the gradual process of Absolute

Spirit becoming self-conscious.[105] Through human beings' awareness of the unity of

finite and infinite (i.e., Reconciliation), God comes to a new self-awareness. Thus, for

Hegel, the goal of essence is to eclipse existence, the goal of the future is to abolish the

present, and the goal of the universal or collective is to overcome individuality and

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103. Kant, *Religion Within the Bounds of Reason*, 4–6, 129–31.

104. Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, 231.

105. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover; Toronto: General Publishing Company, 1956).

distinctiveness. In Hegel's Idealism, individual human beings are all but absorbed into

God, as "the individual is only an abstract moment in the History of absolute Mind."[106]

This process reached its pinnacle with the publication of Feuerbach's *The Essence*

of Christianity. Following Hegel, Feuerbach maintained a dialectical synthesis but

rejected Hegel's Idealism and located the synthesis entirely within human consciousness.

He aimed to demonstrate that "the antithesis of divine and human is altogether illusory,

that it is nothing else than the antithesis between the human nature in general and the

human individual; that, consequently, the object and contents of the Christian religion are

altogether human."[107] In contrast to Hegel, it is not that God actualizes Godself in

humanity; rather, humanity actualizes itself by projecting and objectifying its highest

ideals in the form of 'God' and subsequently working toward their realization. For

Feuerbach then, religion is nothing other than man's subjective ideals made to seem

objective and separate from himself. Feuerbach went on to reinterpret traditional

Christian doctrines according to his projection thesis. For example, God as a perfectly

moral being is merely the moral law personified. The Incarnation is merely a

personification of love for the benefit of humanity. Israel's God is merely the ego of

Israel, "the personified selfishness of the Israelitish people, to the exclusion of all other

nations,—absolute intolerance, the secret essence of monotheism."[108] It is not difficult to

see the impact of Feuerbach's thesis on some of the most influential atheistic thinkers of

the twentieth century, such as Freud (religion is a coping mechanism that projects 'God'

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106. De Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 104. For a different interpretation of Hegel's conception of the relationship between infinite and finite, God and the world, see Martin J. De Nys, *Hegel and Theology* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 82–107.

107. Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, trans. George Eliot (Amherst: Prometheus, 1989), 13–14.

108. Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, 114.

to satisfy unmet needs) and Marx (religion is opium for the people, a projection to help them cope with and accept their oppression).

B.   Implications for Community and Society

1.   Dissolution of human community

Questions about the possibility, meaning, and character of human community emerge from the foregoing analysis, three of which I will raise presently. First, what options for grounding human community remain once ontological and teleological accounts of personhood are abandoned? Six ways of grounding society are most influential, though none are satisfying from the perspective of theological anthropology as developed in section two of this dissertation. One option is to envision community as a social contract based upon and sustained by collective fear and self-preservation (Hobbes). A second is to depict community as a kingdom of ends or a rational association of cause (Kant). A third is to see community as defined by competing desires and self-assertions (Nietzsche, postmodernism). A fourth possibility is community as an embodiment of collective self-interest and expression (Sartre, existentialism). A fifth conception is community as an instrumental good for its members (sociobiology). A sixth alternative is community as concentric circles of care (Noddings). We will explore each of these possibilities in chapter two, evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of each and finally proposing that none is fully satisfying.

Second, what is the meaning of human community in the context of postmodernity in which personal identity is fluid, defined as it is by constantly shifting preferences and relationships? In premodern societies people received their sense of identity, belonging, and knowledge of the good life from within their *given* communities,

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as contributing members of those communities. In contrast, in postmodern societies individual choice is the starting point. Lacking stable grounding in a formative community united in a vision of the good, which is embodied in its traditions and institutions, the postmodern individual defines herself in the residual void of consumerist individualism. She chooses whom to be, where to belong, and what is ultimately good and meaningful—or else chooses to remain undecided or uncommitted about all of these—and then searches for social connections that accommodate or allow for the exploration of such preferences.[109] In light of this, one suspects that the very notion of a 'postmodern community' is inherently incoherent (unless one is free continually to redefine the meaning of community, in which case the concept becomes too vague to be useful).[110] It would seem so, if we mean 'community' in the Christian sense of a group of people profoundly bound together spiritually, committed to sharing life together, pursuing a common vision of what is good and true, toward which end children are raised and instructed and newcomers are initiated and integrated.[111] Granted, a postmodern individualist could choose to band together with others of like mind and commit to a chosen lifestyle or mission, but without a deeper spiritual bond or shared ultimate convictions mere choice is an unstable and potentially misleading foundation (i.e., which lifestyle, which mission?). Moreover, as we will see in chapter three, genuine Christian

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109. MacIntyre argues that the determinative question becomes: what kind of social contract with others is it reasonable for me to enter into? (*After Virtue*, 251) By contrast, Christian community "joins us with others to further the growth of a tradition whose manifold storylines are meant to help individuals of a tradition identify and navigate the path to the good. The self is subordinate to the community rather than vice versa, for we discover the self through a community's narrated tradition" (Hauerwas. *Peaceable Kingdom*, 28).

110. It might be helpful to distinguish between 'postmodern community' (which, being 'founded' upon postmodern assumptions, seems internally incoherent) and a community that operates within and engages postmodern culture.

111. I am aware that the term 'community' has become notoriously difficult to define. My purpose here is not to argue in favour of a particular definition but to observe a lack of coherent criteria for deciding what constitutes a postmodern community.

community cannot be constituted or sustained on the basis of mere personal choice. Genuine Christian community is something that God establishes between believers as the Holy Spirit unites them spiritually to Christ and one another. In addition, Christian community is not homogeneous but brings together and reconciles people of diverse backgrounds, interests, and passions.

Third, how can we hope to preserve stable and abiding communities when we deny the existence of a common story that tells us who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going? Competing rationalities, embodied in different traditions and narratives, lead to rival conceptions of what is good and just.[112] A community united in pursuing a vision of the good requires a unifying narrative. As Hauerwas argues, "Good and just societies require a narrative, therefore, which helps them know the truth about existence and fight the constant temptation to self-deception."[113] Unfortunately the only narrative that modern liberal society accepts and teaches is that *we have no such narrative*.[114] This implies that we have no common (coherent) rationality with which to

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112. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 1, 391, 396.

113. Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 18. Recall also Taylor's argument that frameworks provide the necessary background for moral judgment and are required for human agency (*Sources of the Self*, 26–32).

114. Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 84. I am taking Hauerwas to be referring to the failure of the Enlightenment project in its attempt to ground morality solely on abstract principles of pure reason. Ironically, though liberalism claims to be free of all tradition, it has become its own tradition with its own conception of a just order and of the human good (MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 344–45). Moreover, many influential philosophers and ethicists have discerned a common story impacting Western values (even if others deny or repress that story). For example, John Rawls argues that beneficence/nonmaleficence, autonomy, and fairness are characteristic of Western ethics (Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999]). Beauchamp and Childress argue that the principles of nonmaleficence, beneficence, autonomy, and justice, permeate and inform bioethics. They claim to have abstracted these principles from common Western morality. See Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Granted, as James Peterson points out, we must not think of these values as merely abstract rational principles without any grounding in history and tradition. As mere abstract principles, they are partially helpful but not specific enough to guide concrete action. They need to be interpreted and applied within a broader context of a 'thick' descriptive framework. See Peterson, *Changing Human Nature*, 164–65.

evaluate and adjudicate between the competing values, beliefs, and preferences of

individuals (see section B.2).[115] Consequently, what holds modern society together is not

a communal sense of purpose but a shared context of conflict and struggle.[116] This

struggle characterizes modern politics, which at its best takes the form of negotiation and

at its worst degenerates into sheer sophistry and empty rhetoric.[117] MacIntyre thus

portrays modern liberal society as "a collection of citizens of nowhere who have banded

together for their common protection" and as a "shipwrecked collection of strangers."[118]

While I agree with new traditionalists such as Hauerwas and MacIntyre that (post)modern

liberalism is not the ideal form of human sociality and cannot serve as a sufficient basis

for *Christian community*, I believe that a version of liberalism is still the best practical

option we have for our contemporary pluralistic and democratic *society*.[119] Moreover, I

do not see this as a compromise or watering-down of Christianity, but rather a valid and

potentially fruitful expression of it.[120] The important point to take from the new

traditionalist criticism of liberalism is that one cannot articulate a robust conception of

human community (especially from a Christian perspective) on the basis of the

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115. MacIntyre says that "in the practical reasoning of liberal modernity it is the individual *qua* individual who reasons" (*Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 339).

116. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 253; Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 45–48.

117. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 336–43.

118. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 156, 250.

119. Logan, "Liberalism," 527–31; Todd Whitmore, "Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism in Christian Ethics: A Critique of Stanley Hauerwas," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (1989): 207–9. In a very interesting article M. Cathleen Kaveny demonstrates that contract law can be conceived as a MacInyrean tradition offering productive insights about truth and justice that avoid both sceptical relativism and naive foundationalism (673–87). Moreover, she argues a common law approach leaves room in society both for a common morality (interpreted by public law) and for movements and traditions that influence and shape that common morality, which common law then takes into account (693–94). See M. Cathleen Kaveny, "Between Example and Doctrine: Contract Law and Common Morality," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 44, no. 4 (2005): 669–95.

120. Novack, "Human Dignity and the Social Contract," 54–55, 58; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Jeffrey Stout on Democracy and its Contemporary Critics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33, no. 4 (2005): 633, 643–47.

assumptions of (post)modern liberalism alone; one needs a richer, "thicker" understanding of the human person for that task. To summarize then: Our culture's current anthropological agnosticism has led to an erosion of the grounds, the meaning, and the stability of human community.[121]

2.   Disintegration and dichotomization of personal and social ethics

A clear grasp of what it means to be human is crucial for Christian ethics, not only for addressing particular ethical questions and quandaries but even more fundamentally for creating and sustaining an integrative vision of what constitutes a good and significant human life in its wholeness. As Ellen Wondra puts it,

> How theologians speak of persons is crucial to Christian ethics and the Christian life. How persons understand themselves deeply shapes how they approach others, how they cherish and judge their relationships, and how they go about being faithful to the truth of the gospel proclamation that God's work of creation, providence, and salvation is carried out in part through human life with its various structures, groupings, and modes of reflection and expression.[122]

Not only Christian ethics but all ethical systems maintain and depend upon assumptions about human persons. Correspondingly, no description of human persons is purely neutral; every conception of what it means to be human has ethical implications for how human beings ought to conduct their lives. "A description of human nature always both presumes and entails a prescription for human living. The *what/who* questions and the *how* question are inseparable."[123] Consequently, any worldview that remains naive, vague, or elusive in its understanding of human personhood (intentionally or non-

121. By questioning tradition, modern society has made important contributions to freedom and the quality of human life, (e.g., issues such as slavery, racism, and the status of women in society). At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that such advancements were typically based in a modern metanarrative (e.g., freedom, reason, etc.) or on a traditional view of the human person (e.g., as possessing intrinsic worth). Whether such values can continue to be sustained without appealing to a metanarrative or a definitive view of human personhood is debated.

122. Ellen K. Wondra, "Participating Persons: Reciprocity and Asymmetry," *Anglican Theological Review* 86 (Winter 2004): 58–59.

123. Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 3.

intentionally) lacks the ability to articulate and practice a coherent and consistent human ethic. Ethical confusion or chaos ensues. Worse, a fallacious view of what it means to be human leads to a misguided, reductionist, or sometimes even destructive ethical system, in which case oppressive dehumanizing policies can ensue.

In his influential book *After Virtue* Alasdair MacIntyre argues that the contemporary modern world is in a state of grave moral disorder resulting from a history of moral deterioration. We currently possess only fragments of a once-unified moral scheme, but have lost the contexts that previously gave them significance and cohesion. We use bits and pieces of traditional moral language, but have rejected key aspects of the worldview that made such language meaningful. Consequently, in the modern world, we make ethical claims that have the appearance of being rational and objective but are actually based upon arbitrary choices. We cloak these arbitrary assertions in quasi-rational and mythical notions, such as 'utility', 'rights', and 'therapeutic' and 'bureaucratic' expertise.[124] Moreover, the disappearance of a common and cohesive moral scheme has led to a situation in which opponents in moral debate frequently argue from incommensurable premises and therefore have no recourse to a rational resolution of issues. This state of affairs stems from the Enlightenment's rejection of the Aristotelian ethical tradition, and particularly the latter's teleological orientation. In its place we are left with either Stoic rule-following (the Enlightenment tendency) or sheer Emotivism (Nietzsche's alternative), both of which are prevalent in contemporary culture and exist as two sides of the same teleologically deprived coin.[125]

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124. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 79–86.

125. Taylor refers to Enlightenment moral approaches generally as "ethics of obligatory action," since they focus on the principles, injunctions, or standards which guide action while altogether neglecting visions of the good. Their concern is with what one ought to *do*, not with what is intrinsically valuable or

The notion of an ultimate human *telos* is crucial for the Aristotelian ethical

tradition that MacIntyre wishes to defend and endorse. This is because one can make

factual evaluative judgments about something only if one understands its *telos*, its

purpose or goal. For example, one can make the evaluative judgment "this is a good

watch" or "this is a bad watch" only if one understands that the purpose of a watch is to

tell time. Thus, a conception of *telos* is a necessary link between factual statements and

evaluative judgments. Without recourse to *telos*, facts and values become separated and

moral judgement degenerates into personal tastes and preferences. Moreover, this

separation of facts and values, leading to the relegation of morality to the beliefs and

preferences of individuals, would create a bifurcation between personal and social ethics.

While personal ethics would continue to be guided by private beliefs, social ethics would

be guided by the lowest common denominator of public consensus about 'facts.' Personal

beliefs and convictions would be acceptable only so long as they do not interfere with a

person's public roles and responsibilities or intrude upon public discussions of ethical

issues. Unfortunately, just such a rejection of teleology is a defining feature of

contemporary Western culture. Lesslie Newbigin refers to this abandonment of teleology

as "the central citadel of our culture" and describes it as:

> . . . the belief that the real world, the reality with which we have to do, is a world
> that is to be understood in terms of efficient causes and not of final causes, a
> world that is not governed by an intelligible purpose, and thus a world in which

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what one should admire or love. This one-sided focus on action, to the neglect of being or loving, leads to a
procedural or method-driven conception of ethics. For example, neither utilitarianism nor Kantianism
defines what is ethical according to a vision of the good; both associate ethics with a form of reasoning—
for the latter practical reasoning is the method of universalization while for the former practical reasoning
is the method of calculating maximum utility. Similarly, on a larger societal level, the social contract is not
defined by a vision of the good but by a particular procedural starting point (democratic consent). If we
cannot agree on what we should do, let us agree on who should decide. Like MacIntyre, Taylor points to
Nietzsche as one who saw the inherent contradictions in the theories of obligatory action (he saw through
their claims to objectivity and exposed their veiled will to power). See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 79, 84–
90.

the answer to the question of what is good has to be left to the private opinion of each individual and cannot be included in the body of accepted facts that control public life.[126]

However, teleological assumptions seem to be inevitable—even in our contemporary postmodern culture, which generally endorses relativism and rejects appeals to an *ultimate* human *telos*.[127] Even relativists rely on a limited (tacit) understanding of *telos* to make rational evaluative judgments about objects like watches. They can do so consistently only because a watch is the creation of human beings who have intentionally defined its *telos*. This *telos* is not ultimate but contingent upon human intention. The statement "this is a good watch" is true, given the purpose that human beings have ascribed to it, but they could just as easily have ascribed another purpose (which would alter the truth status of the statement). However, since they accept the existentialist assertion that there is no such thing as a human *telos*, relativists cannot make moral judgments that they consider to be ultimately true. Morality is not a matter of discerning ultimate truth; it is about being faithful to the purpose or *telos* that *one creates for oneself*. Conversely, for the Aristotelian tradition moral judgments are grounded in appeals to the ultimate *telos* of human beings, hence they are factual judgments and not mere assertions.

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126. Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks· The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 79 and *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 7.

127. One could argue that an understanding of *telos* impacts most, if not all, ethical systems. For example, in Utilitarianism, how could one decide what leads to the greatest utility or happiness for human beings unless one understands something about their purpose for living (i.e., what does it mean to be happy or useful)? Yet this is problematic because utilitarians argue amongst themselves over what is the good to be maximized. Even Existentialism requires the notion of *telos*, though it defines itself in opposition to it. Sartre's position, that there is no such thing as a human nature or a human *telos*, is foundational for his understanding of ethics as the creation of each individual. One of Dostoyevsky's characters is famous for his repeated claim, which has become the personal motto for many existentialists: "If there is no God, everything is permissible." Thus, Nietzsche's critique of modern ethics seems justified (i.e., that they are self-contradictory, masking their own ultimate claims under a facade of neutral objectivity).

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From a Christian perspective, this Aristotelian insight about *telos* highlights the important connection between Christian ethics and theological anthropology. In the moral sphere, factual ethical judgments are possible only when the *telos* of human beings is understood. Our understanding of what it means to be human deeply impacts our understanding and practice of ethics. At a societal level, the creation of a just civil order depends upon a shared vision of the good toward which human beings may collectively aspire. Conversely, the trivialization of questions concerning the identity, purpose, and destiny of human beings impairs the ethical enterprise at both the personal and social levels. Furthermore, misguided or flawed anthropologies breed inadequate or even harmful ethical views and political systems.

3. Collapse of social and global justice

In the modern (and postmodern) Western world, the call for social justice and efforts to attain it usually rest on a belief in the inherent worth of human persons.[128] Such a belief maintains that all human beings are intrinsically valuable and should be respected and protected accordingly. This belief in the basic worth or dignity of human persons grounds most conceptions of and appeals to human rights. For example, the preamble to the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states that "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world."[129] The preamble

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128. See, for example: Elshtain, "The Dignity of the Human Person," 53; Novak, "The Judeo-Christian Foundation of Human Dignity," 100–11, 115–16; Perry, *Idea of Human Rights*, 5; Michael Nai-Chiu Poon, "Show me the Worth of a Human Person: an East Asian Perspective," *Transformation* (January 1998): 13.

129. *Universal Declaration*, 63 (preamble). Moreover, article 1 makes the link between universal human rights and inherent dignity explicit by stating, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (p. 64). Other official documents also make the link. For example, both the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights* (69) and the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (p. 79) include the words from the Universal Declaration preamble quoted above and

makes two claims about the basic status of all human persons. The first is that human persons have inherent dignity. This means that they have an intrinsic worth (rather than instrumental or conferred worth) that is sufficient to ground their possession of certain natural rights. Second, the natural rights that human beings inherently possess are equal and inalienable. This means that all human beings possess them without measure or discrimination (universal) and that such rights cannot be withdrawn, altered, ignored, violated, or trumped in favour of some other human life-good (inalienable).[130]

Given the traditional and widespread grounding of human rights in the intrinsic worth of human beings, an important question surfaces: *what warrants this belief in the inherent worth of human beings*? Why is a being of this kind inherently worthy of such great respect? How can we justify the claim that such beings have certain rights that *must not be violated*, regardless of the 'good' or utility that might be achieved by doing so? The question is particularly vexing in our contemporary cultural context of anthropological agnosticism. If we cannot even agree on the meaning and purpose of human beings, how can we attribute inherent worth to such beings and what would motivate us to respect their basic rights? Some have acknowledged the problem and attempted to base human rights on something other than inherent worth or dignity. In his book, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs*, Nicholas Wolterstorff surveys and rejects several such attempts, which he collectively labels "right order" (as opposed to "inherent rights") approaches. A basic feature of "right order" proposals is that they envision human rights as being always conferred (often socially) rather than inherently possessed.[131] For

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additionally state: "*Recognizing* that these rights derive from the inherent dignity of the human person . . ." (p. 69; emphasis original).

130. Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 291.

131. Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 35.

example, Wolterstorff summarizes Richard Rorty's position as follows: "There is no

human nature for human rights to be grounded in. It is only the social practice of

according certain rights to each and every human being that attaches rights to the status

of being human."[132] Accordingly, Rorty recommends abandoning notions of inherent

human rights based on dignity or worth (what he calls "rights foundationalism") and

instead expanding the scope and reach of our current human rights practices beyond our

own culture by telling "sad and sentimental stories" to evoke sympathy and

compassion.[133] Leaving aside the problem that Rorty's position seems to endorse a kind

of arbitrary cultural imperialism (arbitrary because abandoning rational criteria for sheer

cultural consensus), Rorty takes for granted that such stories will in fact evoke sympathy

without the need for underlying convictions and beliefs about the worth of human

persons. Yet dehumanizing the other has a long history, full of examples of people who

demonstrate great charity, sympathy, and compassion toward some people while

committing horrendous acts against others, usually because they see these others as being

of lesser worth or as being less than fully human (for example, the Nazi who is also a

loving husband, father, and community leader). Something more than mere sentiment is

required to sustain and motivate a strong belief in and commitment to universal and

inalienable human rights. As Max Stackhouse powerfully asserts,

> If human rights are the product of scribblers and sophists only, or even of
> pioneers and pilots, they will not long endure. Sentiments will change, and other
> construals will be imagined, other paths found, other channels dug. Human rights
> will be like civil rights—what is promulgated by one ruler or passed by one
> legislature can be rescinded by the next. The erosion of the gains for human
> rights could easily occur, at tremendous human cost, if the idea of human rights

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132. Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 321. Wolterstorff corrects a misunderstanding that he detects in Rorty's
position, namely the misunderstanding that one needs to believe in human 'nature' in order to believe in
natural human rights.

133. Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 320.

is based on nothing more than the changing course of historical experience and discourse about it.[134]

Perhaps a more promising approach is to ground human rights in prior obligations. However, Wolterstorff raises four objections to such a proposal.[135] First, the totality of one's duties is too narrow to account for all of one's rights; some rights have no corresponding duties (e.g., certain rights to privacy and respect). Second, it erroneously envisions our obligations as fixed or given and our rights as being determined out of these obligations. However, this linear progression from obligations to rights is neither obvious nor consistent; sometimes rights lead to obligations and sometimes the removal of a right removes an obligation (which makes the simple ordering of obligations to rights problematic).[136] Third, some human beings have no duties because they are incapable of forming intentions (babies, patients in a coma, etc.) yet such human beings have rights and can be wronged. Finally, Wolterstorff argues that a comprehensive theory also has to account for God's rights, but God is entitled to certain rights that have no corresponding (much less foundational) obligations (e.g., God has a right to our worship).[137]

If Wolterstorff is correct that social conferral or "right order" approaches are insufficient to sustain human rights (I believe he is) and that the only plausible basis is the inherent worth of human persons, then our initial questions remain: *what warrants a belief in the inherent worth or dignity of human persons and what would motivate us to*

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134. Max L. Stackhouse, "Human Rights and Public Theology: The Basic Vindication of Human Rights," in *Religion and Human Rights: Competing Claims?* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), 14.

135. Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 246–48. In particular, Wolterstorff is here responding to Paul Ramsey's proposal in *Christian Ethics and the Sit-In* (New York: Association, 1961), chapter 1.

136. Wolterstorff provides the following example. Suppose that it is indispensible to the fulfilling of one's obligations to travel to work, in which case one has a right to travel freely to work. But suppose that a terrorist attack has rendered such travel impossible, in which case one no longer has those obligations that could not be fulfilled without travelling to work. Nevertheless, one still has a right to travel to one's office and is wronged in being prevented from doing so.

137. For Wolterstorff's full criticism of attempts to ground human rights in obligations or duties, see *Justice*, 244–84.

respect their basic rights? Moreover, as this is a matter of belief, a second question lies at

the heart of the issue, namely: "is the idea of human rights ineliminably religious?"[138]

Writers such as Wolterstorff, Michael Perry, and Max Stackhouse answer persuasively in

the affirmative; the various secular attempts to ground human rights are either incoherent

or insufficient. One proposed option for a secular basis of human rights is to ground the

notion of human dignity in some capacity that human beings uniquely possess, such as

rationality (this is the approach Kant pursued). However, there are at least three problems

with all capacities-based approaches to grounding human dignity: (1) inevitably some

human beings do not possess the named capacity and therefore fall outside the circle of

human dignity (e.g., infants and the severely mentally disabled lack the capacity for

rational agency); (2) some animals do possess the capacity (e.g., emotion, rational

agency) and thus it cannot qualify as uniquely human;[139] and (3) the possession of an

innate capacity is unlikely by itself to impress someone who already abuses human

rights.[140]

Another option for a secular basis of human rights is to provide a nonreligious

interpretation of the sacredness of human life. For example, Ronald Dworkin argues that

sacredness does not reside within human beings themselves but is attributed to them

because there is something special about how they came to be. In particular, two

characteristics stand out: first, human beings are the highest product of natural creation;

second, they are the product of human creativity (creative masterpieces). These two

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138. This is the title of the first chapter of Michael J. Perry's *Idea of Human Rights*, 11–41.

139. For evidence that some animals possess the capacity for rational agency, see for example Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999). On the other hand, it is important to point out that no animal grasps rationality to the emergent level of basic human beings. See James C. Peterson, "The Religion of Genetics," *Theology and Science* (forthcoming).

140. See Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 330–33.

features lead to the breathtaking realization of the sacredness of human life. Dworkin's

argument is unconvincing for at least two reasons. First, by identifying a mature property

in human beings it becomes vulnerable to the same charge levelled at capacities-based

approaches. Specifically, it inevitably excludes some human beings because not every

human being measures up to the standard of being a creative masterpiece of natural and

self-creation.[141] Second, how does sacredness as Dworkin explains it differ significantly

from merely being awe-inspiring, and why are only human beings sufficiently awe-

inspiring to be considered sacred? Similarly, Michael Perry asks, "How does the fact that

something is a masterpiece of natural and human creation make that something not

merely a creative masterpiece but sacred?"[142] Perry suspects that Dworkin is trading in on

the greater strength of the objective sense of sacred as it is commonly used (i.e.,

sacredness as attributed from the outside, from God, not just a subjective experience of

awe), thereby smuggling into his secular interpretation connotations of value, mystery,

and transcendence that properly belong to the religious concept.

A third possibility for attempting a secular grounding of human rights (though

without reference to human dignity) is to employ what Perry calls the self-regarding

strategy.[143] Conceptually similar to Hobbesean social contract theory, this approach

begins with the need for self-preservation—whether of individual persons, families,

tribes, races, religions, etc.—and posits that certain rights must necessarily be attributed

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141. Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 334. For example, it is difficult to argue that a person with a severe mental impairment qualifies as the highest product of natural creation a creative masterpiece of self-creation.

142. Perry, *Idea of Human Rights*, 27. Later he states, "that something is a creative masterpiece and understandably inspires awe in us entails neither that it is sacred nor even that we believe it to be sacred (in the strong sense)." (p. 28)

143. Perry, *Idea of Human Rights*, 32–35. Wolterstorff discusses and critiques a similar approach endorsed by Alan Girwith (*Justice*, 335–40). He notes that Girwith's is a capacity-based (though not dignity-based) proposal.

universally to all in order to safeguard the rights of oneself or those of the group to which

one belongs. Unfortunately, such an approach cannot provide a solid basis for universal

human rights, especially for the kind of rights endorsed by the United Nations. One

problem is that a self-regarding approach is dependent on the existence of fear, but what

motivates and sustains an agreement when no fear is present or when existing fear is

alleviated?[144] An agreement to respect the rights of others makes sense for those who

have relatively little power and influence, but what would motivate powerful individuals,

groups, or nations to endorse it? Granted, powerful parties might be interested in entering

into a contract with other powerful parties, but what would motivate them to safeguard

the rights of the powerless? Another problem stems from its self-orientated or self-

motivated nature. An agreement of mutual respect makes sense between two parties who

have complementary incentives and resources (trade, security, natural resources, etc.).

However, what would motivate a rich and self-sufficient party to respect the rights of a

poor and needy one?[145] For example, the human rights scholar Richard Bilder writes,

"Despite considerable effort, it has been difficult to construct a wholly convincing

'selfish' rationale for major U.S. national commitments to promote the human rights of

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144. Thus, Perry says it amounts to little more than a "mere non-aggression treaty" (Perry, *Idea of Human Rights*, 32). Does a self-regarding approach have to begin with fear? Could it begin with personal advantage instead? Concerning those human rights that are basic human freedoms and protections, it is difficult to see what one would stand to gain in protecting basic freedom unless the possibility of their being violated existed. Some human rights could perhaps be established on the basis of mutual advantage (e.g., the right to education or the right to food and clothing), but whether or not these are genuine *inalienable human rights* is questionable and disputed. Wolterstorff, for example, argues that relatively few positive rights are truly *human* rights (i.e., recognized inherently on the basis of one's humanity). See Wolterstorff, *Justice*, 314.

145. Alasdair MacIntyre observes that the very notion of a just wage makes no sense within the confines of modern liberalism (devoid of teleology), in which contracts are by definition self-motivated (*Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 111).

foreigners."[146] Given such observations, Bilder considers self-regarding arguments to be difficult to prove and unpersuasive.

In light of the foregoing discussion, I surmise that secular approaches to grounding the inherent worth of human persons are neither fully coherent nor sufficiently satisfying.[147] Moreover, secular approaches tend to lack sufficient motivational power. Consequently, with Wolterstorff and others, I have serious doubts about whether a human rights culture can be sustained on a secular basis that lacks a strong belief in the intrinsic worth or dignity of the human person.[148] It seems to me that the logical outcome is that with the passing of time and the changing of circumstances—especially if circumstances change from favourable and affluent to unfavourable and desolate—there will be an erosion of our culture's affirmation of universal and inalienable human rights (perhaps such erosion has already begun with the willingness of some to compromise basic human rights).[149] Given our culture's current state of confusion, I suggest that what is needed is a fresh explication of what it means to be human, one which helps us grasp and safeguard the inherent worth of each person as intrinsically valuable before and deeply loved by

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146. Quoted in Perry, *Idea of Human Rights*, 34.

147. As Jens Zimmermann notes. "Any honest genealogy of humanism shows us that the ideals of secular humanism are impossible without their Christian antecedents. When we look not for the actual use of the term humanism but for the basic concepts we associate with this term—a focus on a common humanity marked by human freedom, dignity, and creative ability—when we do this, we find that humanism originates Judaic and Christian roots." See his essay, "Being Human, Becoming Human: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christological Humanism," in *Being Human, Becoming Human: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Social Thought*, ed. Jens Zimmermann and Brian Gregor (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 26.

148. Max Stackhouse observes that in recent times explicitly secular governments and regimes have been the most frequent and ruthless violators of human rights. He cites the examples of Papa Doc's Haiti, Pol Pot's Cambodia, Marcos's Philippines, Mao's China, Stalin's Soviet Union, and many petty tyrants in Latin American and Africa, "all of whom rejected theology in favor of 'modern scientific' approaches to social reality" ("Human Rights," 21).

149. For a brief summary of this position, see Wolterstorff, "Can Human Rights Survive Secularization?" (parts 1 and 2).

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God. What is needed, in other words, is not merely an anthropology but a robust and compelling *theological* anthropology.

C.   Concluding Summary

This dissertation aims to demonstrate the potential significance of theological anthropology for ecclesiology and in particular how the former can help us better understand the nature and character of the church's (inner) sociality and its (outward) relation to the world, especially with respect to personal, social, and global ethics. The purpose of this chapter was to provide the background context in which the problems I seek to address have emerged. It began by observing that many of our culture's most treasured values and moral commitments depend on particular beliefs and convictions about human beings, yet in our current cultural context there is much confusion, disagreement, and outright controversy (and denial) about the meaning and purpose of being human, leading to a kind of anthropological agnosticism. In our contemporary culture, people often struggle to find a secure sense of identity and purpose. They feel alone in a world that seems meaningless and absurd, and hence they are vulnerable to the powerful and disorienting forces of individualism, relativism, reductionist materialism, and consumerism. The chapter then discussed four factors that have contributed to or intensified the problem, including the fragmentation of the self, the lack of consensus about the *telos* of the human person, the problem of scientific reductionism, and the loss of a transcendent reference point situating human persons before God. Three implications of the present predicament were subsequently discussed, namely the dissolution of human community, the disintegration and dichotomization of personal and social ethics, and the collapse of social and global justice. The chapter concluded by identifying the need to

formulate a robust and compelling theological anthropology. Such a project could help us to understand and begin to practice a deeper, more holistic and transformative approach to Christian community, with an intrinsic connection to personal, social, and global ethical formation and engagement. However, before proceeding with this task (in chapters three through six), it will be helpful first to identify and evaluate the options for human community that remain given the current context of anthropological agnosticism. Chapter two discusses several such options and finds that none of them provide an adequate basis for Christian community or a sufficiently holistic connection between community and ethics.

Chapter 2:
Rival Accounts of Being Human and Being in Community in Contemporary Culture

A. Introduction

As human beings we are all members of particular communities and our

understanding of community is intimately linked with our understanding of what it means

to be human. Yet as the previous chapter argued, the understanding of what it means to

be human in contemporary culture lacks precision, due to the fragmentation of the

concept of the 'self', a rejection of the notion of a human *telos* with a correspondingly

'thick' descriptive framework, and scientific reductionism. This chapter will offer an

overview of six dominant typological ways of construing community, based on

conflicting views of the human person that are implicitly or explicitly operative in

contemporary culture. I do not intend a taxonomy, which is a system of classification

according to observations of empirical differences and is generally used in the biological

sciences to describe individuals. Instead of a taxonomy, I offer a typology, which

classifies according to conceptual differences and is generally used for broad affinity

classes.[1] Each community type I propose corresponds to a particular view of the human

person, defined as follows: the rational creature of the Enlightenment (type 1: a social

contract between consenting individuals, and type 2: a rational association of cause and

duty); the self-defining individual (type 3: based on desire and self-assertion, and type 4:

based on common interest and expression); the self-preserving animal (type 5: an

instrumental good for its members); and the caring person (type 6: concentric circles of

care). I then note how each of these approaches shapes and motivates a different

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1. Kenneth D. Bailey, *Typologies and Taxonomies: An Introduction to Classification Techniques* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1994), 6. See also my discussion of this methodology in the Introduction.

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movement or expression of the contemporary church. Such an analysis is beneficial

because many accounts of being human and being in community in contemporary culture

lead to two major problems that distort our understanding of human sociality and ethical

responsibility. These two problems are reductionism and the polarization of key issues

leading to the creation of false dualisms in our understanding and practice of community

and ethics.

B.   Rival Accounts of Being Human and Being in Community in Modern and

Postmodern Culture[2]

1.   The rational creature of the Enlightenment

Being human as rational capacity

Enlightenment views of the human being typically associate personhood with the

capacity for rational thought and reasoning. Moreover, Enlightenment views place an

emphasis on individual subjectivity and agency, and tend to downplay or deny the role of

tradition and sociality in constituting personhood. Thus, for Descartes the human being is

an individual thinking substance, for Locke a disengaged subject of rational control, and

for Kant a pure rational agent.[3] From this starting point one can construe at least two

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2.   Miroslav Volf remarks that contemporary society is neither consistently modern nor consistently postmodern, but represents an uneasy combination of both. It is "caught in an ambiguity . . . that stems above all from the fact that it is precisely modernity that keeps generating the most conspicuous features of the postmodern condition" (*Exclusion and Embrace A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1996], 30).

3.   Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 69–74; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 12, 49. Recall also Taylor's depiction of Locke's 'punctual self' (see chapter 1). Even Schleiermacher, who recognized the importance of sociality for Christian life, tended to prioritize the individual over the community (though in Romantic rather than Rationalist terms). For him, the church is the place where free and equal people who are already religious gather to share their religious feelings (i.e., their joint sense of sharing as finite individuals in the Infinite). See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *On Religion. Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1994).

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accounts of human community, including community as a social contract and as a

rational association of cause and duty.

Community as a social contract between consenting individuals

While many different forms of the social contract have been proposed, for our

purposes we will focus on the ideas of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, since both

thinkers are seminal to its initial development.[4] For both Hobbes and Locke, the need for

human beings to band together formally arises out of what they refer to as humankind's

natural condition. In this condition, human beings are without a political society and

government and live in a state of anarchy.[5] Accordingly, they have no recourse to

established laws against which to measure and analyze disputes, no access to a non-

partial judicial system with the authority to settle them, and no power or means to execute

settlements made or agreements reached.[6] Hobbes argues that in this condition nature

divides human beings and predisposes them to invade and destroy one another.

Competition over scarce resources, the resulting need for self-defence, and the desire for

greater glory lead respectively to conflicts to secure gain, safety, and reputation.[7] Each

individual is caught in a struggle for survival against all other human beings (Hobbes

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4.   See also, David Novak, "Human Dignity and the Social Contract," in *Recognizing Religion in a Secular Society Essays in Pluralism, Religion, and Public Policy*, ed. Douglass Farrow (Montreal; Ithaca: McGill-Queens University Press, 2004), 51–68; John Perry, "John Locke's America: The Character of Liberal Democracy and Jeffrey Stout's Debate with the Christian Traditionalists," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 27, no. 2 (2007): 227–52; John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard University Press, 1999); Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); and Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Jeffrey Stout on Democracy and its Contemporary Christian Critics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33, no. 4 (2005): 633–47.

5.   It is not important to the argument whether this natural state precedes the political society historically; what matters is the way Hobbes and Locke develop this conceptually (as if they were telling us to imagine a group of humans living in close proximity without any form of governance).

6.   John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, in *Philosophical Works and Selected Correspondence of John Locke* (Charlottesville: InteLex, 1995), 351.

7.   Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. A. P. Martinich (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2005), 94–95. See also Locke, *Two Treatises*, 350.

calls it a war) and each is equally vulnerable to misfortune and attack.[8] Consequently, the

life of a human being is "solitary, poor, brutish, and short."[9]

Hobbes discerns two "fundamental laws of nature," which derive rationally from

this state of affairs.[10] First, human beings must seek peace, but if they cannot attain it

they are entitled to defend themselves (Hobbes takes the absolute natural right to self-

preservation and self-defence as a basic assumption). Second, they must be willing to

accept limitations on their unrestrained natural freedom for the sake of common peace.

This second law leads to the notion of a social contract, by which every individual agrees

to surrender a degree of personal freedom in order to attain greater security and

productivity as a group.[11] Hobbes reasons that such an agreement could be effectively

binding—for all parties involved, in both the present and the future—only if a higher

authority with the resources and coercive power to enforce it is established. Once

established, this governing authority would regulate, for the sake of the common good,

the efforts of individuals toward personal gain and self-preservation. It would wholly take

upon itself the responsibility to protect individual rights and to administer justice when

such rights are offended.[12] For Hobbes and Locke, the social contract lies at the

foundation of political or civil society.[13]

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8.   Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 93–97; Locke, *Two Treatises*, 351–53.

9.   Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 96.

10.   Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 99–100.

11.   For Locke, the chief purpose of entering by social contract into a commonwealth is to secure the property of individuals (by 'property', Locke means their lives, liberties, and estates). See Locke, *Two Treatises*, 350.

12.   Thus, by entering into contract individuals surrender their natural rights to unrestrained self-preservation (now regulated by government) and to vengeance (now wholly assumed by government). See Locke, *Two Treatises*, 351–52.

13.   As Locke writes, "Those who are united into one body, and have a common established law and judicature to appeal to, with authority to decide controversies between them, and to punish offenders, are in civil society one with another." Locke, *Two Treatises*, 323.

The social bond uniting a community together in the social contract theory is a contractual arrangement to pursue mutually common benefits. The social contract provides a powerful model of society and governance that deeply and broadly impacts the way people in contemporary Western democracies think about human sociality. Not only have contractual concepts come to dominate our political theory and practice; they have also shaped our basic values and ideas concerning relationships in general (e.g., our views of marriage and family, student-teacher relationships in education, patient-doctor relationships in medicine, and laity-clergy relationships in religious institutions). Envisaging community as a social contract has both strengths and weaknesses. One strength is that a social contract is a good way to secure broad and basic consent in a pluralist and secular context of competing values, beliefs, and worldviews. A community conceived according to social contract notions could tolerate a high degree of diversity and accommodate a variety of interests and ideas, even while ruling out some basic forms of nonconformity. A second strength is its realism concerning the human propensity toward self-interest and the inevitable conflict that such self-interest fuels. Accordingly, the social contract model recognizes the importance of capable leadership and effective authority structures, with proper checks and balances, to the healthy functioning of community. A third strength is that the social contract model has a good historical record (especially when compared to other forms of government) of generally securing peace and personal liberty for its members. Even communities that do not agree with its basic foundations should appreciate and learn from its track record of establishing relatively just and equitable conditions for its members (if the bargaining parties are indeed relatively equal in the negotiation).

However the model also has problems. First, it lacks a sufficiently positive

motivating vision for human sociality, often basing human social bonds on a foundation

of mutual fear and suspicion.[14] Even if one wishes to resist Hobbes's pessimistic

portrayal of natural human existence as "solitary, poor, brutish, and short," every version

of the social contract model still begins with mutual self-interest, which then needs to be

regulated, mitigated, suppressed, or somehow channelled positively for the sake of the

common good.[15] It is doubtful that at least some of the values, goods, and practices

crucial to the functioning of a healthy community (especially a genuinely Christian

community) could be sufficiently and stably grounded and sustained by collective self-

interest alone. What is needed is a broader, redemptive, and hopeful account of

humanity's inherent dignity/worth, purpose, and destiny. A second weakness is that the

social contract builds community upon an individualistic foundation, which implicitly

assumes that relationships are secondary and perhaps even peripheral (or accidental in the

Aristotelian sense) to essential personhood. The model seems to envision already mature

individuals joining into community with other mature individuals in order to pursue

common goals.[16] It fails to account for the constitutive role that relationships and

community play in the formation of personal identity and worldview and in the

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14. A related criticism is that the social contract depends upon the association of individual wills, in other words it is voluntaristic in nature. This voluntaristic orientation developed in the wake of the breakdown of the sacramental approach to community that characterized classical Christian thought. See, for example, Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, *Bonds of Imperfection. Christian Politics, Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) and Jean Bethke Elsthain, *Sovereignty: God, State, and Self* (New York: Basic, 2008).

15. On the notion of channelling self-interest into serving the common good, see Michael Novak, *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982). See also Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic, 1974).

16. Hobbes employs the social contract as a kind of thought experiment, rather than a descriptor of actual human experience. Even so, the thought experiment is individualistic. This might be sufficient for applying the social contract within the context of a modern pluralistic society but it is an insufficient basis for Christian *community*, which begins with peace and unity in Christ by the Spirit.

development of practical reasoning.[17] Moreover, a social contract model of community

has difficultly accounting for the theological conviction that the ultimate basis for

Christian community is the spiritual union of believers with Christ, which amounts to a

joint participation in the life and communion of the triune God (the social contract leaves

that diagnosis to personal choice).[18] This includes but goes far beyond the possession of a

common set of ideas, tasks, and goals. A third weakness of the social contract model as a

basis for community is that social consensus alone does not provide a sufficient

grounding for morality and justice. Questions of morality and justice concern the

discernment of truth, not simply the weighing and tallying of preferences. The morally

appropriate course of action might not always be the popular one. Moreover, while social

consensus might achieve a high degree of social cohesion, it might also ignore or

overrule legitimate minority views within the group.[19] Similarly, common agreement

might not be consistent between groups (especially if other such groups are also founded

in the collective self-interest of their members), leading to inter-group or inter-

community conflict and potentially to wrongs committed against outsiders. Finally, social

consensus is insufficient because sometimes entire groups choose to support morally

abhorrent ideologies and policies. One thinks immediately of Nazi Germany, South

African Apartheid, the status of women and/or children in many cultures, or the

widespread acceptance of slavery throughout human history. Such examples demonstrate

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17. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

18. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, ed. Geffrey B. Kelly, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness, vol. 5 *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 31, 35–38; Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness· The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 129.

19. This is why the United States could not agree on its constitution until it established the Bill of Rights, which guarantees rights for individuals against the coercive power of the majority. In Canada, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms likewise affects the interpretation of the constitution and protects individual rights.

that social consensus alone does not provide adequate critical controls for truthful and just communal moral discernment and practice. Accordingly, modern society often hopes that if it cannot reach consensus on what is the right thing to do, it can at least agree on who gets to decide. Agreement is on the process, not the ends.

Community as a rational association of cause and duty

In contrast to the social contract model of Hobbes and Locke, which is based on empirical observations concerning human nature, Immanuel Kant develops both his view of the human person and his view of community through *a priori* reasoning in accordance with the 'universal principles of reason.' For Kant, the human being is a rational moral agent born with an innate capacity for practical (moral) reasoning as well as a sense of duty or obligation to obey the moral law. One of the ways that Kant states the basic law of pure practical reason is: "So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle of universal legislation."[20] We can observe three fundamental and distinctive Kantian emphases in this statement. First, the concept of universality is crucial to all of Kant's thought, including his epistemology, his anthropology, his ethics, and his view of community. Whatever is true is true universally, for all human beings. What is morally binding for one person is binding for everyone. This focus on universality allows Kant to resist various forms of moral relativism, emotivism, and utilitarianism.[21] Second, Kant stresses the importance of free will. One must *choose* to adopt those maxims (personal rules) that could become universal laws. For Kant, morality does not consist in blind conformity to an external law or authority; rather, it has

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20. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), 45.

21. For example, Kant argues that 'personal happiness' cannot supply dependable moral laws because it is too subjective: what counts as happiness differs with each person according to tastes and preferences (*Critique*, 33–34).

its basis in the practical reasoning and decision making of the free moral agent.[22] This

preserves the dignity of the human being as a rational creature and protects moral agents

against the control or manipulation of external forces (e.g., authority figures or

institutions, religious or moral systems). Third, in close relation to his emphasis on

freedom, Kant underscores the importance of personal autonomy. For Kant, true virtue

cannot be coerced because morality concerns one's will and motivation, not merely one's

actions. As a clear and simple illustration of Kant's point, it would be morally irrational

for me to command someone to love me. Such a command cannot have binding moral

force because love cannot be coerced but involves personal will and motivation and must

be freely given and received. This example is representative of Kant's moral reasoning

generally, except that Kant prioritizes duty as the primary ethical motivation. One should

act ethically simply because it is the right thing to do, not because one stands to gain by

such action or because one is being coerced into doing it.[23]

Two other formulations of Kant's basic moral law lead to the envisioning of

community. The first is that one should treat every rational being as an end in itself, never

as merely a means to an end. This formula universalizes the freedom, autonomy, and

dignity belonging to each rational individual. The second is that, having accepted the

criterion of universality for all of one's own ethical maxims, one should envision oneself

as a member in a universal moral realm or a "kingdom of ends." In this ethical

commonwealth, every person devotes herself to obeying the moral law and to treating

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22. For Kant, the freedom of the will is the source of the moral law. We can say that one *ought* to do something only if the possibility for choosing that course of action exists. Conversely, one is not obligated to do what one cannot possibly do (*Critique*, 48–60).

23. Divine laws are different, because they always and universally command obedience for the sake of doing what is right and because God knows the state of one's heart and will (Kant would strongly disagree with the view that God gives arbitrary laws or is content with mere external conformity to them). Human laws can never be equivalent in status or force to divine laws (or the moral law), but if human laws are truly just then obedience to them is required by our obligation to the moral law.

every other person as an end and not merely as a means to an end. Thus, according to Kant, community serves the constructive purpose of uniting free and responsible moral agents in the common pursuit of obedience to and equality under the moral law.[24] Moreover, in keeping with his basic assumptions of universality, freedom, and autonomy, Kant emphasises the non-coercive nature of an ethical commonwealth.[25] People enter the commonwealth voluntarily and remain together under non-coercive moral laws (by which Kant means laws chosen and followed voluntarily, rather than civil laws enforced publicly). For Kant, the most genuine ethical commonwealth can be realized only in the form of a church, which he depicts as a household or family under a common (though invisible) moral Father.[26] Kant further describes the church as "a voluntary, universal, and enduring union of hearts" and identifies four defining characteristics, including universality, morality, freedom, and stability.[27] Primary among these is universality; for Kant, universality is the token of a true church.[28]

The bond of community in a Kantian approach is common submission to the moral law. The greatest strength of Kant's approach is that it views community as being inherently ethical in nature. In his view, ethics is not an afterthought to be worked out secondarily as a group pursues more pressing and central goals and objectives; rather,

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24. Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. Theodore M. Greene and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), 85–91.

25. Kant, *Religion*, 87–91.

26. Kant, *Religion*, 93.

27. Universality concerns the unity of the church under pure practical reason without sectarian divisions. Morality concerns the purity of the ecclesial union, as people are motivated to join together for moral reasons rather than superstitious or fanatical ones. Freedom characterizes both the internal relationships of members to one another as well as the external relation of the church to political power. Stability means that the church operates under an unchanging constitution with settled laws, though its administration may be subject to change. See *Religion*, 93.

28. Kant, *Religion*, 100–5. Accordingly he argues that pure religious faith, which in essence is reverence for God and obedience to the universal moral law, must be the "highest interpreter" of particular, historical, and revealed faith. Conversely, "a church dispenses with the most important mark of truth, namely, a rightful claim to universality, when it bases itself upon a revealed faith" (p. 105).

community *in its very essence* is an ethical entity. Consequently, serious and ongoing

reflection on pertinent ethical questions, issues, and commitments is vital to the

constitution and continuing vitality of genuine community. From a Christian perspective,

this fits well with the New Testament's depiction of the church as a community

characterized by and devoted to progressive sanctification.[29] A second strength of Kant's

approach is that his ethical theorems are basically sound and helpful. The categorical

imperative, bearing some resemblance to Jesus's Golden Rule, is a helpful guide for

considering how our potential actions might impact others and is likely to promote

justice, fairness, and respect for the dignity of human persons. Additionally, his

"kingdom of ends" provides a welcome critique of forms of community that are based in

collective self-interest or driven by consumer values and choices. Kant effectively

demonstrates that consequentialism or utilitarianism cannot provide a sufficient rational

foundation for ethics or community. A third strength is that Kant's emphasis on

rationality helpfully guards against forces of mindless conformity, groupthink,

fanaticism, and emotionally manipulative forms of leadership. Thus, it helps to defend

and prioritize the dignity of individual persons as free and intelligent moral agents. This

resonates with a theological description of the church as a rational community of wisdom

and discernment (see chapter 7).

One weakness of the Kantian approach is its dependence on the notion of a moral

law that is universally accessible to and binding for all. This dependence tends toward a

naive conception of ethics as a matter of just being rational (naive because the meaning

of 'rational' is largely taken for granted). This is problematic epistemologically, because

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29. E.g., Matt 5–7; Rom 12; Eph 4:17–32; Phil 3:17–21; 1 Pet 2:9–12; 1 John 2–3.

there are many different cultures with many different conceptions of morality, each depending upon a different form of practical reasoning or rationality, thus prompting the question: "Whose justice? Which rationality?"[30] In response to this objection, a Kantian proponent might argue that a demonstrably high degree of consensus existing between cultures on crucial moral issues points to the existence of a universal moral law. This might well be the case, yet three problems remain. First, moral consensus alone does not provide sufficient grounds or warrants for ethics according to the rules of Kantian practical reasoning. From a Kantian perspective, it is not enough that people arrive at the same moral conclusions; rather, they must arrive at them for the same reasons (duty to the moral law). The existence of widespread consensus on major moral issues does not amount to compelling evidence for the universal moral law (conceived according to Kantian *a priori* reasoning) if such consensus does not derive from a common form of practical reasoning and is not inspired by a common motivation. Second, even if we grant the existence of a universal moral law, at a practical level the lowest common denominator of abstract and universally applicable rules might not provide the flexibility or specificity required for concrete and particular moral dilemmas.[31] Third, the universal moral law is deficient from a theological perspective, not so much because of what it says and teaches but because of what it fails to say and teach. General revelation needs to be clarified, augmented, and personalized by special revelation.[32] As I argue in chapter four (section C.2), God's commands are not abstract but are based upon God's character, which God reveals personally in the economy of salvation history and especially in the

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30. See MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*

31. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott, vol. 6, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 219–20.

32. See, for example, Richard J. Mouw, *He Shines In All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

person and actions of Jesus Christ. Most importantly, a Kantian generalizing or universalizing approach fails to account for the personal Lordship of Jesus Christ and softens his more radical teachings.[33]

A second weakness of a Kantian approach is that its conception of community is not inherently relational. While it emphasizes that persons are ends in themselves, united together in a kingdom of mutual ends, it still envisions *community itself* as being only a means to an end. This is because relational bonds are secondary to the practical or ethical goal of following the moral law. From a theological perspective, this fails to account fully for the incarnational, embodied, and intrinsically social character of human existence (in its creation, reconciliation, and transformation).[34] Lacking in the Kantian view is a relational ontology that envisions human beings as bound together deeply by the Spirit and drawn into the life and community of the Trinity (see chapter 3).[35] A third weakness of a Kantian model of community is that it lacks a sufficiently practical and biblically faithful strategy for Christian ethical and spiritual formation. Specifically, it does not account adequately for the authority and formative role of Scripture or the importance of ritual and tradition to the vitality of Christian community (e.g., worship, catechism, sacraments, and spiritual disciplines).[36] In addition, grounding community in duty and

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33. For example, Jesus once commanded a rich man to sell all of his possessions (Matt 19:16–30), but the categorical imperative would not allow for such a thing because if everyone acted this way the results would be disastrous. The command is warranted not because of its universality but because of the personal lordship of Jesus Christ and its implications for this particular individual.

34. Kant prioritizes the individual's relationship to the universal moral law, and downplays the importance of traditions and other institutional means of embodying moral reasoning (see, for example, *Religion*, 97).

35. This is not surprising, given Kant's views on the Incarnation, the person and work of Jesus Christ, soteriology, and the doctrine of the Trinity. Concerning these doctrines, Kant's assumptions place him closer to Arianism and Pelagianism than to historically orthodox mainstream Christianity.

36. For the importance of these to Christian life and community see, for example: Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*; Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Stephen E. Fowl and Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and*

devotion to rules, rather than in love and character formation, leaves the Kantian approach vulnerable to legalism. Epistemologically, Kant proceeds from the recognition of ethical imperatives to the positing of spiritual and metaphysical indicatives. This manoeuvre reverses the model clearly endorsed by the New Testament (observable, for example, in all of the Pauline epistles), which is a movement from the indicatives of grace and union with Christ to the imperatives of obedience and ethical living.

2.   The self-defining individual

Being human as individual self-creation

A second influential way of conceiving what it means to be human is to view the human person as an individual self-creation. This approach begins with subjectivity and particularity, rather than with objectivity and universality, and emphasizes becoming over being and existence over essence. Epitomized in various ways by existentialist thinkers, it focuses on promoting individual freedom and responsibility, authentic existence, and resistance to the system or collective (each conceived in existentialist terms).[37] For our present purposes, we will restrict our focus to two of its seminal thinkers, Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre, exploring how each conceives of human existence and the implications these conceptions have for human community.[38]

Ethics in Christian Life (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character. Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); Reinhard Hütter, *Bound to be Free. Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics, and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart. Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002); N. T. Wright, *After You Believe· Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2010).

[37]Alasdair MacIntyre suggests a slightly different scheme of four key existentialist themes, including intentionality, being and absurdity, freedom and choice, and angst and death. See his entry "Existentialism," in *The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, vol. 3., ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan and Free Press, 1967), 147–54. See also Christine Daigle, "The Problem of Ethics for Existentialism," in *Existentialist Thinkers and Ethics* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2006), 6–12.

38.   I am aware of the controversy concerning which thinkers should properly be categorized as existentialists (Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are two prominent examples). In his sampling of existentialist·

Erotic communities of desire and self-assertion

Nietzsche rejects metaphysics as a starting point for philosophy and as a valid

source of knowledge for human existence and ethics. He especially rejects all forms of

Platonism, which posit and then prioritize the beyond over present existence, the

universal over the particular, and the absolute over the concrete (his immediate targets

were Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant who attempted to construct philosophical and

ethical systems on the basis of *a priori* universal truths).[39] He also rejects Christianity,

believing it to be a form of "Platonism for the people."[40] Nietzsche's rejection of Platonic

modes of thought follows two lines of critique. First, Platonism lacks epistemological

credibility. Nietzsche argues that ever since Plato philosophers have believed that they

could attain an objective apprehension of the good, from which they could rationally

derive truth about human nature and formulate ethical imperatives. However, according

to Nietzsche, this belief is both illusory and deceptive. What is actually going on is that

philosophers begin with their own (often unconscious) assumptions and then project them

onto reality disguised as universal and self-evident truths. Subsequently, they make truth

claims and derive ethical rules and laws from these supposedly self-evident and objective

universal truths. As Nietzsche puts it, philosophers "pose as though their real opinions

had been discovered and attained through the self-evolving of a cold, pure, divinely

indifferent dialectic," whereas in fact, "a prejudiced proposition, idea, or 'suggestion'

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writers, Solomon includes S. Kierkegaard, I. Turgenev, F. Dostoevsky, F. Nietzsche, H. Hesse, M. Heidegger, R. M. Rilke, M. de Unamuno, K. Jaspers, F. Kafka, G. Marcel, A. Camus, J-P. Sartre, M. Merleau-Ponty, S. de Beauvoir, H. E. Barnes, M. Buber, P. Tillich, K. Nishitani, C. Wilson, V. E. Frankl, G. G. Márquez, S. Beckett, L. Borges, H. Pinter, J. Heller, P. Roth, and A. Miller. See Robert C. Solomon, *Existentialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). For my present purposes, it is sufficient that both Sartre and Nietzsche address the 'existential' themes under consideration in the present chapter section.

39. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (Mineolo: Dover, 1997), 5–8.

40. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, x.

which is generally their heart's desire abstracted and refined, is defended by them with arguments sought out after the event."[41] According to Nietzsche, what actually lies behind all such systems and claims is a veiled will to power, a desire to dominate, control, and rule.[42] This will to power is the basic existential reality of all animals, including human beings. Nietzsche believes that we should recognize and celebrate our will to power for what it is, not hide it behind appeals to purportedly transcendent values or claims to 'truth.' He writes, "It is nothing more than a moral prejudice that truth is worth more than semblance; it is, in fact, the worst proved supposition in the world . . . Indeed, what is it that forces us in general to the supposition that there is an essential opposition of 'true' and 'false'?"[43] For Nietzsche, there is no connection between this world and the beyond, between the particular and the universal, or between the concrete and the absolute. Goodness, truth, and God are myths.[44] All we can talk about is our existence as individuals in the phenomenal world.

Nietzsche's second line of critique is that the Platonic approach is morally reprehensible, because it elevates the universal over the particular and thus leads to a "herd instinct" that fosters a "herding animal morality."[45] Nietzsche argues that,

41. Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 3.

42. Nietzsche asserts. "A living thing seeks above all to *discharge* its strength—life itself is *Will to Power*" (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 10). Postmodern writers have picked up and developed Nietzsche's claim that the will to power underlies all conceptions of truth and morality. They seek to expose and deconstruct the metaphysical systems and metanarratives that obscure or conceal it by appealing to 'self-evident' truths or by telling grand stories. See for example: Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) and Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

43. Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil*. 26.

44. Alasdair MacIntyre describes the implications of Nietzsche's moral philosophy as follows: ". . . if there is nothing to morality but expressions of will, my morality can only be what my will creates. There can be no place for such fictions as natural rights, utility, the greatest happiness of the greatest number. I myself must now bring into existence 'new tables of what is good.'" See *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003). 114.

45. Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil*, 68.

historically, it was the rich, the powerful, or the aristocratic who typically appealed to the beyond or to transcendent values. They did so in order to assert and justify their status and significance over against the masses. Thus, for the aristocratic, the appeal to the beyond was really an expression of their will to power. For the masses, however, belief in the beyond was a means of coping with their lowly state, fostering within them 'a herd instinct' (i.e., there is comfort in knowing one's place).[46] Marx expressed a similar idea when he branded religion as opium for the people, because it leads people to be content with poverty and repression by creating a story that rationalizes their current circumstances. In addition, this 'herd morality' is always maintained as a collective value system, in which the dreams and aspirations of individuals are repressed because they threaten the system's equilibrium. What is seen as 'good' is whatever maintains the status quo of the commanding class; what is seen as 'evil' is whatever threatens it. 'Goodness' especially includes passive or acquiescing qualities, while 'evil' includes rigorous, aggressive, and ambitious qualities.[47] In opposition to such a herd morality, Nietzsche envisions a world that is beyond good and evil, one in which the will to power is given free reign. In particular, the Judeo-Christian moral sentiments of surrender, sacrifice for one's neighbour, self-renunciation, and disinterested contemplation must be rejected.[48] Nietzsche asks us to imagine a world in which "nothing else is 'given' as real but our world of desires and passions, that we cannot sink or rise to any other 'reality' but just

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46. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 65.

47. Nietzsche writes, "The lofty independent spirituality, the will to stand alone, and even the cogent reason, are felt to be dangers; everything that elevates the individual above the herd, and is a source of fear to the neighbour, is henceforth called *evil*; the tolerant, unassuming, self-adapting, self-equalising disposition, the *mediocrity* of desires, attains to moral distinction and honour" (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 67; emphasis original).

48. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 25.

that of our impulses. . . ."[49] The heroes of this world are the "new philosophers" who

possess "minds strong and original enough to initiate opposite estimates of value, to

transvalue and invert 'eternal valuations.'"[50] They exhort individuals to resist the

collective, the 'herd', and instead to assert their will and be the masters of their own

destiny.[51]

In a Nietzschean perspective human sociality takes the form of 'erotic'

communities of desire and self-assertion, in which the bond of unity is the will to mutual

subjugation and exploitation. In such communities, one joins together with others in order

to assert one's own desires for power and control, self-fulfillment, recognition, and/or

honour. From this view, the conversation of Jesus's disciples concerning who among

them would be the greatest in the kingdom was exemplary in its 'honesty', 'courage', and

calculating shrewdness in light of the cold, hard truth of human existence. Put in

psychological terms, a Nietzschean perspective cynically views all relationships as being

codependent. Notions of equality, democracy, genuine interdependence and other-

centeredness are regarded not only as illusions but as a weak and degrading acceptance of

mediocrity and powerlessness.[52] Of course, in actual communities this will to power is

rarely recognized for what it is; generally, it remains hidden, disguised, or buried in the

subconscious minds of its members. The key assumption is that however altruistic,

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49. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 27.

50. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 69. For example, Nietzsche writes, "severity, violence, slavery, danger in the street and in the heart, secrecy, stoicism, tempter's art and devil or every kind,—that everything wicked, terrible, tyrannical, predatory, and serpentine in man, serves as well for the elevation of the human species as its opposite . . ." (pp. 31–32).

51. While Nietzsche did not envision a lawless or tyrannical society, he completely undermined traditional morality and its values.

52. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 16, 31. Nietzsche also argues that the idea of the common good is a contradiction in terms, because what is common is always of low value (p. 30).

loving, generous, or selfless people might appear to be, they are at base simply seeking

community in order to use others to satisfy their own needs and goals.[53]

Phileic communities of common interest and expression

Like Nietzsche, Sartre was critical of deterministic or essentialist conceptions of

the human person, which he observed in philosophical Idealism and assumed were

intrinsic to all theological accounts of personhood. In response, he began from an

intentionally and explicitly atheistic starting point.[54] He argued that our understanding of

the world, human nature, and ethics cannot be determined by appeals to transcendence or

universal Being or God. Conversely, the crucial epistemological commitment is that

existence precedes essence or, stated differently, subjectivity is the starting point.[55] The

implication of this is that "human beings create themselves." They first "exist", "turn up",

"appear on the scene," and only subsequently define themselves.[56] Sartre writes, "If

existence really does precede essence, there is no explaining things away by reference to

a fixed and given human nature. In other words, there is no determinism, man is free,

man is freedom."[57] Moreover, "There can no longer be an *a priori* Good, since there is no

infinite and perfect consciousness to think it."[58] Without recourse to divine purpose or to

a priori ethical principles based on the good, human beings are alone and must invent

themselves moment by moment by their choices and actions. For Sartre, this is a terrible

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53. For example, someone who serves others has a base need to be needed. Someone who empathizes with others has a base need for emotional connection. Someone who teaches and mentors others has a base need for influence and respect the fulfilment of which requires that others be followers.

54. He writes, "Existentialism is nothing else than an attempt to draw all the consequences of a coherent atheistic position." Jean-Paul Sartre. *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1957), 51.

55. Sartre, *Existentialism*. 13.

56. Sartre, *Existentialism*. 15.

57. Sartre, *Existentialism*, 21–22.

58. Sartre, *Existentialism*, 22.

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and awesome responsibility, leaving human beings in a predicament characterized by anguish, forlornness, and despair. "Condemned to be free," human beings must choose their own meaning and destiny.[59] Yet Sartre remains hopeful that the existentialist approach frees people from deliberation and encourages action, since they are no longer required to be preoccupied with questions of ultimate good and evil or paralyzed by a fixed cosmic order.

Sartre is confident that his perspective is liberating not only for individuals, but for human community and society as a whole. This is because Sartre believes that his philosophy intensifies ethics as taking personal responsibility for how one's choices in the present shape the future. Moreover, he is optimistic that people will realize that their actions have universal implications. He argues, "for every man, everything happens as if all mankind had its eyes fixed on him and were guiding itself by what he does."[60] Simone de Beauvoir elaborates on the meaning and implications of Sartre's position. She states that the freedom of the individual person is "the source of all values" and the "universal, absolute end," yet such freedom assumes and requires the freedom of others.[61] As she puts it, "To will oneself free is to will others free."[62] This is because one's own freedom depends upon an open future, which, in turn, depends upon the willingness and charity of others not to interfere.[63] Individual freedom is maximized when people work collaboratively toward universal freedom for all. In light of such remarks, Beauvoir

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59. Sartre, *Existentialism*, 23, 32.

60. Sartre, *Existentialism*. 20. Elsewhere he writes, "The man who involves himself and who realizes that he is not only the person he chooses to be. but also a lawmaker who is, at the same time, choosing all mankind as well as himself, can not help escape the feeling of his total and deep responsibility" (p. 18).

61. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citidel Press; Kensington Publishing, 1948). 58.

62. Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*, 73.

63, Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity*. 82.

seems to envision a kind of unofficial social contract to maximize the liberty of all.[64]

However, in the existentialist approach the emphasis lies not on the need for community as an authority structure to guard against the weaknesses or selfishness of human nature (as in the Hobbesean social contract model), but on the intrinsic goodness of choice itself and the absolute value of freedom to seek one's own preferences and to express one's own individuality and uniqueness. In this model, individuals come together in community in order to pursue their interests and to express themselves with and amongst other like-minded people. Thus, the bonds of community according to this model are the shared interests and experiences of its members. On a societal level the logical outcome of such an approach is the creation of many homogenous groups of common tastes and preferences. This implication is especially likely in a consumer society, in which choices and products are multiplied to match aggregate consumer demand. I have called this approach to community 'phileic' (friendship love) because it is akin to a contemporary understanding of friendship as a relationship based in common interest and expression.[65]

Evaluation of existentialist notions of human community

An existentialist model of human community has at least three strengths. First, its stress on the importance of human freedom protects individual persons from being absorbed into a collective that represses individuality and mistakenly equates unity with uniformity. It helpfully depicts community as something that preserves and celebrates the diversity and differences of its individual members. Christian theology also emphasizes

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64. Beauvoir writes, "to be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is to be able to surpass the given toward an open future; the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom" (*Ethics of Ambiguity*, 91). For a more detailed discussion of Beauvoir's understanding of freedom, see Daigle, "The Ambiguous Ethics of Beauvoir," *Existentialist Thinkers and Ethics*, 120–41.

65. This contemporary understanding of friendship differs markedly from both an Aristotelian and a biblical–theological understanding of friendship, both of which view friendship in relation to the pursuit of the good or God.

human freedom. In fact, one of the key metaphors that the Bible employs to describe

Christ's atoning death as a saving event is redemption or ransom. Thus, a major emphasis

in Christian soteriology is that the atoning work of Christ sets people free.[66] This insight

has implications for spiritual and ethical formation in Christian community. For example,

Christian formation is not about blind conformity to social regulations or unquestioned

obedience to the teachings of leaders; rather, it seeks to foster in each person the renewal

of their mind and the cultivation of spiritual discernment, wisdom, and maturity. A

second strength of the existentialist model is its emphasis on authenticity and

responsibility. It reminds us that while a person's identity is inevitably shaped and

influenced by community, it should not be fully determined by the views and

expectations of other people. One of the implications this has for Christian community is

that we must release others from the confines or 'boxes' in which we see them (perhaps

based on past experiences) and from our personal expectations and ideals for their future.

Personhood and identity are not static or fixed entities; genuine existence is constantly in

the making and requires the determination to accept responsibility and to make wise

choices. We must allow each individual the freedom to change and develop into the

person that Christ intends them to become.[67] A third strength of the existentialist model is

its resistance to oppressive systems and structures that claim a special possession of

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66. The New Testament says that Christians are redeemed from the curse of the law (Gal 3:13; 4:4), from all wickedness (Titus 2:13), and from an empty way of life (1 Pet 1:18). They are ransomed by the Son of Man (Jesus Christ) who gave his life on their behalf (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:44; 1 Tim 2:6) to set them free from sins (Heb 9:15). On account of Christ's atoning work, they are freed from their sins (Rom 6:7, 18, 22; Rev 1:5), from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:2) from the rituals of the law (1 Cor 8), from accusation (Col 1:22), and from slavery to the fear of death (Heb 2:15). Moreover, they are set free to love (Gal 5:13), to serve God (1 Pet 2:16), to approach God with confidence (Eph 3:12), and to partake in the freedom of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17). In addition, the Gospels depict Jesus's ministry as freeing people from suffering and disease (Mark 5:34; Luke 13:12) and freeing prisoners from their captors (Luke 4:18). Furthermore, Christ's followers are set free by the truth (John 8:32) and by the Son of God himself (John 8:36).

67. See Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 95.

absolute truth and expect unconditioned loyalty from adherents. Such resistance stems

from its focus on individuality and particularity, concreteness, and contingency, as

opposed to universality, abstractness, and Idealistic immanency. It is no coincidence that

Christian theologians who stood against Nazi ideology in Germany during the Second

World War, such as Barth and Bonhoeffer, were deeply influenced by the existentialist

insights of writers such as Kierkegaard and Buber.[68] Moreover, existentialism's

resistance to systemic oppression resonates with the biblical polemic against demonic

structures that attempt to take Christ's place in claiming our ultimate allegiance.[69]

Existentialism arose largely as a criticism of the epistemology and corresponding

ethics of Enlightenment and Idealist thinkers. A somewhat reactionary movement, its

critiques are often incisive but its constructive proposals are less than satisfying.[70]

Consequently, its greatest critical strengths correspond with deficiencies in its proposed

solutions. First, while its stress on the uniqueness and difference of each person is a

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68. Kierkegaard stressed the contingent character of ultimate truth and divine revelation while Buber articulated the I–Thou personal structure of all genuine relationships.

69. The oldest atonement theory, the *Christus Victor* theory, depicts the soteriological significance of Christ's death as a victory over cosmic forces of evil. These forces could include Satan, demonic beings, or even evil political forces and structures. Moreover, several biblical passages expose and challenge evil in its structural and political forms. For example, in the Old Testament, one thinks of God's confrontation with Pharaoh in Exodus, God's judgment against Israel for making unholy allegiances with foreign kings in Isaiah, or God's condemnation of structural and political injustice and oppression in prophets like Jeremiah and Amos (taking advantage of the poor, the widows and orphans, exploiting people by charging unfair interest, and using religion to justify their evil). Several New Testament passages also contain a polemic against structural and political evil. Jesus's teachings and ministry often provoke confrontations with religious and political leaders. Many Pauline letters contain polemical elements that challenge oppressive political structures. For example, his use of "Lord and Saviour" as a title for Christ was a direct challenge to the self-proclaimed divinity and cosmic-sovereignty of Caesar, who called himself "Lord and Saviour." Or, consider the following statement in Colossians. "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, [Christ] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col 2:15). As a final example, the book of Revelation contains a subversive yet devastating attack on the oppression and godlessness of the Roman Empire. See Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010).

70. MacIntyre's evaluation of Nietzsche is insightful: "For it is in his relentlessly serious pursuit of the problem, not in his frivolous solutions that Nietzsche's greatness lies, the greatness that makes him *the* moral philosopher if the only alternatives to Nietzsche's moral philosophy turn out to be those formulated by philosophers of the Enlightenment and their successors" (*After Virtue*, 114). This acknowledgement of genuine insight into the problems of human existence, while simultaneously lacking helpfully constructive proposals, could characterize other existentialist thinkers as well (e.g., Sartre, Camus).

welcome challenge to views of community that tend toward uniformity, its own proposals

lead to a radical individualism. Thus, the same criticisms of the individualism of

Enlightenment models (Hobbes/Locke, Kant) apply here as well, but to an even greater

degree. Given the epistemological commitments of existentialism, the social bonds of a

community amount to little more than similar personal tastes and preferences. Since

tastes and preferences are subject to constant change (especially in a postmodern,

consumer culture), the foundation of an existentialist model of community is highly

unstable. Moreover, basing a community upon the common desires of its members fails

to account for the Christian stress on truth lived out in *agape* love. Insightful and

instructive in this regard is Dietrich Bonhoeffer's distinction between genuinely spiritual

community and emotional or psychic community. For Bonhoeffer, genuine spiritual

community is created, centred, and formed in and by Christ, while false forms of

community depend on human agendas, ideals, and emotions. Bonhoeffer writes:

> The bright love of Christian service, *agape*, lives in the spiritual community; the
> dark love of pious-impious urges, *eros*, burns in the self-centered community. In
> the former, there is ordered Christian service; in the latter, disordered desire for
> pleasure. In the former, there is humble submission of Christians to one another;
> in the latter, humble yet haughty subjection of other Christians to one's own
> desires. In the spiritual community the Word of God alone rules; in the
> emotional, self-centered community the individual who is equipped with
> exceptional powers, experiences, and magical, suggestive abilities rules along
> with the Word. In the one, God's Word alone is binding; in the other, besides the
> Word, human beings bind others to themselves. In the one, all power, honor, and
> rule are surrendered to the Holy Spirit; in the other, power and personal spheres
> of influence are sought and cultivated.[71]

A second weakness is that the existentialist understanding of freedom is deficient.

While it effectively articulates the individual's freedom *from* other people to satisfy one's

own desires and goals, it lacks a corresponding emphasis that freedom is also *for* others.

From a theological perspective, true freedom involves not just the liberty to do what one

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71. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 39–40.

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wants; it also involves a transformative movement toward others in selfless, sacrificial, and redemptive love. True freedom enables one to love and serve God and others as one should. It is epitomized by the way God exercises God's own freedom in being bound to human beings through covenant and by redeeming and uniting them in Christ.[72] Third, while Christian theology affirms existentialism's rejection of the oppressive manipulation of 'truth' and authority, it cannot endorse existentialism's tendency to abolish all appeals to truth and authority structures. From a theological perspective, these forces are not inherently oppressive but only become so when they are abused. Existentialists fail to make this distinction and thus create an impoverished and reductionist account of these realities, leading to a model of community that naively rejects the importance of authority and governance (will not authority assert itself in some form anyway?). Moreover, its rejection of ultimate truth undermines its commitment to freedom. On the basis of existentialist epistemology, such a commitment is either groundless (as in Sartre) or self-motivated (as in Beauvoir) and thus volatile. One could choose with Sartre to respect the freedom of others, but if such respect for others does not serve one's agenda one could just as consistently side with Nietzsche in choosing the path of manipulative self-assertion by employing one's sovereign freedom to subject others to one's own will.

3.   The self-preserving animal

Being human as biological determination and preservation

A third influential attempt to describe what it means to be human comes from sociobiology or evolutionary psychology, as represented by Edward O. Wilson. According to Wilson, modern scientific discoveries about the evolution of human beings

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72.   Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*, vol. 3 *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 63.

and other creatures have created two great dilemmas for human existence and spirituality. First, "No species, ours included, possesses a purpose beyond the imperatives created by its genetic history."[73] Or, put differently, "The species lacks any goal external to its own biological nature."[74] For Wilson, human beings are simply biological entities and every aspect of human nature, development, values, beliefs, and behaviour (e.g., aggression, sex, altruism, religion) can be explained by genetic influence without the need to invoke non-material explanations or reflections. Wilson does not deny the influence of culture and society on individual people, but he insists that the parameters of such influence are predetermined by genes. As Wilson forcefully puts it, "genes hold culture on a leash."[75] All of human existence is rooted in biological evolution and can be explained in terms of natural selection; whatever qualities and characteristics we presently observe about human beings developed because they enhanced the preservation of the species. For example, Wilson says that the brain exists because it promotes the survival and multiplication of the genes that direct its assembly. Moreover, the human mind "is a device for survival and reproduction, and reason is just one of its various techniques."[76] Even complex historical and cultural phenomena, such as philosophies and religions, can be explained by their potential to preserve biological life. "Religions, like other human institutions, evolve so as to enhance the persistence and influence of their practitioners."[77] All religions serve the goal of collective self-aggrandizement.[78] Wilson recognizes that

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73. Edward O. Wilson, *On Human Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 2.

74. Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 3.

75. Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 167.

76. Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 2.

77. Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 3.

78. Sociobiology is, in many ways, a pseudo-scientific counterpart to Nietzschean philosophy. One can discern parallels between sociobiology and Nietzsche, especially concerning the theme of self/species-preservation as the ultimate good.

his observations are potentially dangerous, because they undermine the transcendent

beliefs and goals that have held together and organized traditional societies.[79]

This recognition leads to the second dilemma for human existence and

spirituality. Sociobiology tells us that religion and morality evolved because innate

censors and motivators existing in the brain (due to their species enhancing qualities)

deeply and unconsciously impacted the formulation of religious and ethical premises. If

this is the case, there is no such thing as transcendent religious truths or moral values and

we must choose what should be maintained and what should be abandoned—we must

choose our morality.[80] Even so, Wilson does not surrender morality to personal whim or

preference, but insists that sociobiology can provide not just a descriptive explanation but

also normative prescriptions for ethics based on scientific empirical observations.[81] His

basic moral premise is that ethics should serve the preservation of the species. "Human

behaviour . . . is the circuitous technique by which human genetic material has been and

will be kept intact. Morality has no other demonstrable ultimate function."[82] Whatever

increases our potential for survival is good; whatever threatens it is bad. Sociobiology can

help us to distinguish these scientifically.

Community as an instrumental good for its members

Wilson does not devote much attention to human community, but a

sociobiological model of community can be inferred from his discussion of altruism and

kin selection. The social bonds in this model of community are ultimately biological in

nature. From an evolutionary perspective, human community is an instrumental good for

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79. Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 4.
80. Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 4–7.
81. Stephen J. Pope, "Engaging E. O. Wilson: Twenty-Five Years of Sociobiology: E. O. Wilson as a Moralist," *Zygon* 36 (June 2001): 233.
82. Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 167.

its members and promotes their potential for survival and reproduction. Of course, most

contemporary people do not see themselves joining a community in order to preserve

their genes or multiply their offspring, but these basic instincts presently operate at a

subconscious level, having been formulated and deeply engrained over thousands of past

generations. Thus, according to Wilson, human relationships and community are

ultimately self-serving and are designed to safeguard the preservation and progeny of

individuals. One objection commonly raised against Wilson is the problem of altruism. If

relationships and community are basically self-serving, how does one explain the

sacrificial and charitable qualities and behaviours that characterize many human beings?

Wilson's response is that there are two kinds of altruism. 'Soft-core' altruism is easily

explained by the predictions of natural selection as being selfish, calculating, and as

expecting reciprocal benefit or reward.[83] People are good and charitable toward others

because they want others to be good and charitable to them (though self-deception and

lack of self-awareness often mask such egocentric motivations). Sometimes this self-

serving altruism is more obvious, as when corporations publicly support charities or

causes as marketing strategies or when individuals give in order to receive tax benefits.

'Hard-core' altruism, which is irrationally and unilaterally directed toward others without

a desire for reciprocation or concern for social reward or punishment, is more difficult to

explain. For example, why would someone risk her life to save a complete stranger

without regard for personal benefit or social recognition? Wilson explains that such

behaviour likely evolved through 'kin selection,' which is a kind of natural selection

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83. Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 155–56.

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operating on entire groups to ensure the survival of one's close relatives.[84] Individual acts of self-sacrifice for loved ones in the past led to the preservation of altruistic tendencies in entire groups, which were passed on to future generations and continue to have sub-conscious effects on human behaviour in the present. Wilson argues that most human altruism is 'soft-core' or directly self-oriented, which provides a sociobiological basis for a social contract model of community and society.[85]

There are two primary strengths of a sociobiological model of community. First, its basic assumption is that community should protect and nurture human survival and propagation. This is a helpful reminder to ecclesial communities that their existence is meant to serve both the creation mandate and the redemption mandate. One should not be elevated above the other, as when efforts to feed the hungry and promote justice are regarded as simply a pretext for evangelism or, alternately, when spirituality is regarded as simply a pretext for social activism. Both serve God's holistic intentions for the world.[86] Second, like the social contract model it contains valid insights concerning the selfish orientation of human beings, which we ignore to our peril. Community always involves varying degrees of negotiation, mediation, and conflict resolution concerning the differing personal goals and ambitions of individual members. Therefore, wise

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84. Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 155. Such evolution took place as individuals with a genetic disposition toward 'hard-core' altruism sacrificed their lives in order to save their family or tribe, thereby extinguishing their own individual genetic contribution but simultaneously ensuring the spread of the altruistic tendency through the survival of the next generation (e.g., nephews and nieces with similar genes). For a helpful explanation of kin selection, see J. Philippe Rushton, "Altruism and Society: A Social Learning Perspective," *Ethics* 92 (April 1982): 428–29.

85. Wilson, *On Human Nature*, 158–64. Wilson argues that the tendency toward individual self-preservation is a good thing and provides a more stable basis for society than 'hard-core' group preservation. Better to have many self-motivated individuals contract together to pursue their goals under common limitations than to have whole groups at war with each other.

86. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, vol. 6 *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 153–70; John Stott, ed., *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement 1974–1989* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 24, 28; Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit. Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 99–102.

communities are aware of this and create just authority structures as well as healthy

checks and balances that provide accountability for those in leadership.

One weakness of this model is that, like the social contract model, it views social

bonds as being ultimately self-serving. Thus, it cannot adequately sustain a Christian

understanding of personhood and practice of community that is built upon a love that

goes beyond personal altruism and is rooted in and empowered by God's other-centred

agape love.[87] Despite certain advocates of the health and wealth gospel or the church

growth movement, the ultimate purpose of Christian community is not collective self-

aggrandizement as Wilson suggests. Rather, it is union with others in Christ by the Spirit

and formation into Christ's image, which includes a *cruciform* (i.e., self-sacrificial)

pattern of worship and discipleship (e.g., Matt 17:24; Mark 9:33–37; Phil 2:5–11).

Second, a sociobiological approach cannot provide an adequate basis for social ethics.

While its scientific observations might provide some helpful and relevant insights into

how human nature is changing and developing, "scientific accounts of evolution, human

behaviour, neurochemistry, and genetics will always 'underdetermine' ethics."[88] For one

thing, self-preservation is not always a good guide to action. At a communal or group

level, a self-preserving mindset could lead to an institutionalism that continues to

promote the status quo (for better or worse). Or it could lead to a preoccupation with

institutional growth while ignoring the cultivation of more important values and virtues.

Moreover, genetic drives and predispositions are not always a helpful guide to healthy

relationships or ethical actions. For example, genetic influences have been linked to the

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87. Sociobiology seems unable to distinguish between reciprocal love and selfishness; in essence, it reduces all love to lustful desire (not necessarily in a sexual sense, but in the sense of desiring another for one's own personal benefit). Another Nietzschean theme (cf. footnote #78).

88. Pope, "Engaging E. O. Wilson," 237–38.

over-consumption of fatty foods, dangerous thrill-seeking behaviour, some forms of

sexual deviancy, and alcoholism, but such influences are usually not determinative.

Human beings are significantly complex creatures that can (and often should) choose to

ignore their genetic tendencies.[89] Finally, the sociobiological approach suffers from

epistemological deficiencies, including unexamined assumptions and commitments that

lead to reductionist explanations of complex realities (see the previous chapter, section

A.4).[90] Moreover, its epistemological naivety sometimes leads it to posit explanations

that seem too convenient and excessively simplistic. For example, if a scientist observed

that infants cry mostly at night, she could explain such behaviour as an adaptive

advantage to inhibit competing pregnancies. However, if she observed that infants cry

mostly during the day, she could explain it as a genetic advantage to hide the infant from

predators.[91] It seems that for every set of observations a sociobiological conjecture is

readily at hand. As one critic sharply warns, "a theory so protean that it can account for

all observations about life may be little more than a veiled truism."[92] While a

sociobiological description in some cases explains too much, in other cases it explains too

little due to its reductive-naturalistic assumptions. For example, at the discovery of a

biological mechanism regulating moral reasoning a sociobiologist might conclude that

human values, ideals, and aspirations are simply adaptive advantages that serve

biological self-preservation. However, it could just as easily be the case that certain moral

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89. See James C. Peterson, *Changing Human Nature. Ecology, Ethics, Genes, and God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 68, 70–71, 73–76, 183, 191, 195, 198.

90. Stephen Pope exposes two such unexamined assumptions: (1) the methodological assumption that morality can be sufficiently analyzed and explained by the methods of the biological sciences; and (2) the (Humean) assumption that morality is largely a matter of emotions or "intuition based on emotion" (Pope, "Engaging E. O. Wilson," 234–35).

91. Peterson, *Changing Human Nature*, 72. Peterson credits the example to John C. Avise, *The Genetic Gods· Evolution and Belief in Human Affairs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 155–56.

92. Tom Bethell, "Against Sociobiology," *First Things* (January 2001): 19.

values or laws pre-date human biology and pervade the nature of things (i.e., if God

designed the cosmos with certain purposes and goals in mind). If such were the case, one

would expect that natural selection would favour the evolution of biological capacities

that enable moral reasoning.

4.   The caring person

Being human as caring for others

With roots in the ethics of care, this view sees the human being primarily as a

caring person and human community as concentric circles of care. According to Nel

Noddings, relationships are at the heart of what it means to be human and reciprocal

caring is the corresponding framework for ethics. Noddings asserts that the category of

'relation' is ontologically basic for human beings, though she explains that this claim is

based not in metaphysical or theological speculation but in phenomenological

observations about human existence.[93] She writes, "Taking *relation* as ontologically basic

simply means that we recognize human encounter and affective response as a basic fact

of human existence."[94] According to Noddings, caring is the one universal human reality

because all people want to be cared for (even if they themselves do not care for others).

The impulse toward caring is rooted in one's immersion in natural caring relationships,

beginning with a child's early relationship to its parents. Through such basic formative

relationships a person gradually learns both to receive and give what Nodding calls

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93. Nel Noddings, *Educating Moral People. A Caring Alternative to Character Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002), 21. Noddings writes, "It does not depend on gods. or eternal verities or an essential human nature, or postulated underlying structure of human consciousness. Even its relational ontology points to something observable in this world—the fact that 'I' am defined in relation, that none of us could be an 'individual', or a 'person', or an entity recognizably human if we were not in relation." (p. 15)

94. Nel Noddings, *Caring· A Feminine Approach to Ethics & Moral Education* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 4.

'natural care.'[95] This natural caring impulse ought to direct the way people think about and treat others. When facing a situation in which caring does not come naturally or is difficult, one must then draw upon what Noddings calls 'ethical care.' Ethical care is based in and empowered by natural care and allows one to extend the caring relation beyond natural inclinations by drawing on the memories and feelings associated with one's experience of natural caring relationships. Noddings explains, "Because we . . . have been immersed in relations of care since birth, we often naturally respond as carers to others. When we need to draw on ethical caring, we turn to an ethical ideal constituted from memories of caring and being cared for."[96] While natural caring is part of the basic experience of being human, ethical caring must be taught and cultivated through role modeling, dialogue (as empathetic relating not debate), practice through care-giving experiences (e.g., tending to guests, caring for small children, community service, etc.), and what Noddings calls 'confirmation' by mentors and teachers (calling out the best in someone, always giving them the benefit of the doubt).[97] These strategies for moral education encourage 'engrossment,' in which one empathizes with another's concrete situation and comes to understand what that person is feeling and experiencing.[98] They also encourage what Noddings calls 'displacement of motivation,' in which the one-caring adopts and promotes the goals of the one cared-for.[99] In sum, for Noddings genuine human existence is about caring and being cared for.

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95. By 'natural' Noddings does not mean biological, but the basic formative caring relationships that one experiences during infancy and childhood.

96. Noddings, *Educating Moral People*, 15.

97. Noddings, *Educating Moral People*, 15–20; See also *Caring*, 121–24.

98. Noddings, *Caring*, 9, 18–19, 30–35, 112–13.

99. Noddings, *Caring*, 112–13; Raja Halwani, "Care Ethics and Virtue Ethics," *Hypatia* 18 (Fall 2003): 162–63.

Community as concentric circles of care

In a model of community based on the ethics of care, people are bound together in concrete relationships of giving and receiving care. One's community of 'cared-fors' is multi-layered and involves a kind of hierarchy of care defined by four concentric circles, which are differentiated by proximity of relationship to the one-caring.[100] In this model, one is most committed to one's 'intimate others' or those falling in one's innermost circle, such as one's spouse, family, and close friends. These relationships trump all other ethical relations (special dilemmas arise when conflicts occur within this circle). Moving outward, one is committed in a more limited way to people for whom one has 'personal regard.' These may include one's larger friendship group, co-workers, and acquaintances. Three considerations guide one's responsibility here, including one's own feelings, the expectations of other persons, and the nature of situational relationships (i.e., what one owes a boss in comparison to a teacher or a coach is partially determined by the nature and purpose of the relationship: one owes one's boss integrity and quality of work, one's teacher respect and diligence, and one's coach commitment to attending practices). The third concentric circle includes 'potential others' for whom one is prepared to care. These are either people one has yet to meet in the future or those connected through a 'chain of relationships' to others in one's inner circle of care (e.g., a wife's friend, a friend's mother, etc.). The final, outer circle includes 'strangers.' Noddings argues that we have no real responsibility to care for strangers, other than be open and receptive to the possibility that strangers could move inward in our concentric circles of care. This is because, for Noddings, genuine caring must always be concrete (involving actual

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100. See Noddings, *Caring*, 46–47.

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personal relationships) and reciprocal rather than ideal and paternalistic. We cannot 'care-for' everyone abstractly and we are not morally obligated to do so, but we can 'care-about' everyone in the qualified sense of being open and receptive.[101] An interesting outcome of this view is that Noddings insists that we have no ethical obligation to care-for starving children in Africa. While our concern for them might be positive, beneficial, and honourable, it is too abstract to count as genuine caring-for and is not morally obligated (though we might care-about such people as strangers and demonstrate unusually generous support).[102]

An account of being human and being in community based on the ethics of care has some compelling strengths. First, its recognition of the primacy of relationships deeply resonates with the varied Christian tradition, in which love for God and others is central. As we will see in the next chapter, relationships have constitutive significance in a theological account of being human. This emphasis on relatedness, encounter, receptivity, and responsiveness provides a needed corrective to rationalistic and individualistic conceptions of community and ethics.[103] Moreover, Noddings's claim that relationships are ontologically basic finds further grounding in the doctrine of the Trinity. From a trinitarian perspective, not only is the category of relationship ontologically basic for human beings, more fundamentally it is deeply embedded in the structures of ultimate

101. For Noddings's explication of this distinction between caring-for and caring-about, see *Caring*, 1 3 112–13 and *Educating Moral People*, 86–88.

102. See Noddings. *Caring*, 86. Noddings identifies two criteria to guide decisions concerning our o) gation to care for others: (1) the existence of or potential for a present relationship: and (2) the dynamic p) :ntial for growth in the relationship, including the potential for increased reciprocity or even mutuality. Th. first establishes an absolute obligation and the second prioritizes one's obligations.

103. The Protestant summary definition of the church as the place where the Word of God is faithfully p (ıched and the sacraments duly administered fails to give a sufficiently constitutive role to relationships.

reality, being intrinsic to the nature and character of the triune God.[104] Second, a community of care model has important implications for spiritual and ethical formation. Specifically, it encourages us to focus on forming and cultivating *people in their concrete contexts*, rather than indoctrinating them with abstract rules and principles. While not rejecting the place of rules and principles altogether, a community of care model aims to foster a caring environment of formative relationships, which begins to shape the way people treat and respond to others. Third, a community of care model recognizes the importance of emotions for human development, life, and ethics (for both men and women). It reminds us that we are emotional beings, not just rational robots, and that our emotions are to be cultivated and channelled rather than repressed or ignored. This recognition that we are emotional beings is a good reminder to ecclesial communities as they shape their worship and liturgy and develop their strategies for discipleship and spiritual formation.[105]

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104. Noddings herself might object to grounding her theory this way, finding trinitarian doctrine too abstract and speculative (and, granted, in some cases debates about the Trinity have degenerated into abstract speculation). Actually, the doctrine arose as the early church reflected on its concrete experiences of God's actual dealings with human beings, especially though the Incarnation, life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ and through God's ongoing presence with them since the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Concerning the development of trinitarian doctrine and its concrete relevance for Christian life, see for example: David Coffey, *Deus Trinitas. The Doctrine of the Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God. The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004); Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us. The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993); Ted Peters, *God as Trinity Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991); Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Crossroad, 2004); James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community & the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996); and Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God. One Being Three Persons* (New York: T & T Clark, 1996).

105. To make the point, Noddings quotes C. S. Lewis's response to educators in his time who, in fear of the influence of propaganda, were teaching children to set emotions aside in favour of critical and calculating rational thought. Lewis writes, "For every one pupil who needs to be guarded from a weak excess of sensibility there are three who need to be awakened from the slumber of cold vulgarity. . . . [B]y starving the sensibility of our pupils we only make them easier prey to the propagandist when he comes. For famished nature will be avenged and a hard heart is not infallible protection against a soft head." (Quoted in Noddings, *Educating Moral People*, 42).

Probably the greatest weakness of a community of care model is its treatment of the stranger, as explicated by Noddings's notion of concentric circles of care. In ethical terms, in the caring model proximity of relationship always trumps degree of need. However, from a Christian perspective, these must be held in close balance. Undoubtedly, our first priority is to love God and to care for those whom God has entrusted to us. However, we are also to demonstrate care for our ecclesial community, which involves a social bond that transcends the 'natural' relationships of biological family, socio-political ties, and those with whom we share common interests (e.g., Gal 3:26–28). Moreover, Christian care explicitly extends to those who are different and especially to those who are in need.[106] From a Christian perspective, Noddings's view lacks a commitment to addressing and overcoming social and systemic injustices. For example, who will have the proximity and the means to care for the underprivileged if people are responsible only for those in their own socio-economic or geographic circles? In contrast, Christianity expands the concept of proximity by redefining our understanding of the neighbour, the stranger, and the alien.[107] A second weakness of the model is that the criterion of care does not by itself help us to identify precisely which relationships or forms of community are healthy or morally praiseworthy. All that matters is the caring relation between people in the circle. But what if an individual in our circle or even an entire community is complicit in evil? The mafia looks after its own and honour exists even among thieves, but should one really befriend the mafia or join the

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106. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Can Human Rights Survive Secularization?" parts I and II. *Perspectives* 23, no. 3 (March 2008): 10–14, and no. 4 (April 2008): 12–17.

107. Christine Pohl points to examples such the Good Samaritan, the "least of these" in Matthew 25, the early church's practice of ministry to widows and orphans, and the church's status-transcending celebration of the Eucharist, in order to show that one's 'neighbour' includes people very different from us and otherwise considered to be 'strangers.' Pohl also points back to Israelite law (e.g., Exod 23), which legislates protection of and provision for 'aliens.' See her book, *Making Room· Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

circle of thieves?[108] Thus, as Raja Halwani points out, "something is needed to regulate

and to ward off the possibility of such moral corruption."[109] A third weakness of a

community of care model has to do with motivation. If caring for others provides the

foundation for relationships, for community, and for ethics, what happens if one simply

does not care about or empathize with other people? Noddings's answer is that when

natural care is lacking one must invoke ethical care, but why would someone do this? If

care is the only basic ontological reality, and if one has no recourse to other more basic

ethical criteria (e.g., transcendent moral imperatives or fundamental virtues), what would

motivate a person to exercise ethical care? In contrast, a Christian perspective prioritizes

love while also recognizing that love is not merely a human possibility, but is deeply

grounded in the love of God, empowered by the Spirit of God, and cultivated within the

body of Christ, which is the community of faith. This is important because God's

redemptive, reconciling love is at the heart of a Christian understanding of community.[110]

C.   Impact of contemporary views of personhood and community on the church

        Stanley Hauerwas observes that the church is constantly being tempted to imitate

the false politics of the world, especially when false worldly narratives about human

existence and purpose begin to take the place of those embodied in Scripture and the

Christian tradition.[111] If Hauerwas's observation is correct then it is reasonable to ask:

How have the dominant rival conceptions of being human and being in community

discussed above impacted the way Christians understand and practice ecclesiology? The

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108. See Psalm 1.

109. Halwani, "Care Ethics," 163. Halwani picks up on Victoria Davion's criticism that engrossment and motivational displacement are problematic if the one being cared-for is evil. See her article, "Autonomy, Integrity, and Care," *Social Theory and Practice* 19, no. 2 (1993): 161–82.

110. E.g., 2 Cor 5:16–21; Eph 2:11–18; 1 John 4:7–21.

111. Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 8.

analysis provided above already gives a partial answer and what follows below provides some concrete examples. It is important to note that the following comparison is intended to be typological and does not assume a one-to-one correspondence between proposed types and particular ecclesial communities or church movements. It is quite likely that specific churches and movements combine one or more of the proposed types. Moreover, we should acknowledge forthrightly that all of the types have both positive and negative features. The typology is therefore intended as a tool for analyzing and evaluating conceptual differences and for generating awareness of probable practical tendencies and their related strengths and weaknesses.

1.   Social contract and the attractional church

The main feature of an "attractional" model of church is that it is designed to appeal to potential and existing members on the basis of the benefits it offers them.[112] There are two basic versions of the attractional church. One version, as represented by many seeker and independent churches, is analogous to a social contract understanding of community. It involves an implicit contractual agreement in which religious consumers offer faithful attendance and financial giving to the church organization in exchange for religious goods and services they receive from it. Such a consumerist orientation creates a tendency for churches to cater to the self-actualizing goals of its patrons. This approach is indebted to modernist values and epistemological assumptions, such as rationalism, individualism, and the doctrine of progress. It has led attractional churches to under-emphasize history, tradition, corporeal aspects of worship (liturgy, art, architecture, multisensory expression, etc.) and tangible and emotional experiences of the Spirit. Of

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112. For a helpful discussion and critique of the attractional church model, see Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shape of Things to Come. Innovation and Ministry for the 21st Century Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003).

course, if an attractional church were to perceive these as being important to potential members it would emphasize them, but this is to treat them as instrumental rather than intrinsic goods. The second version of the attractional church is analogous to the Kantian notion of community as a group joined together by a common sense of duty under the moral law. Representatives of this version include many conservative churches that distance themselves from the world in order to maintain and promote traditional values and lifestyles. This approach is less consumerist in its orientation, but attractional nevertheless because it envisions the church as an instrumental aid to the moral and spiritual formation of individuals.

The primary strengths of the consumerist attractional type include its ability to draw large numbers and secure basic commitment, its adaptive flexibility, and its relevance to the lives of contemporary people, while the primary strengths of the conservative attractional type include its ability to secure group conformity and the sense of security and convention it provides for its members. The weakness of both versions of the attractional church include excessive individualism lacking an understanding of the church as a mystical union of believers deeply united in the Spirit (and as an intrinsic and not merely an instrumental good), an inward focus lacking due emphasis on social justice and the pursuit of Christ's kingdom purposes in and for the world, and a truncated approach to spirituality failing to balance Scripture *and tradition*, reason *and experience of the Spirit*. If we weigh the attractional type against the historic marks of the church, it prioritizes apostolicity (understood as preaching the gospel) and holiness (in its conservative version) but fails to give sufficient attention to the unity and catholicity of the church due to its individualism and inwardness.

2. Self-defining existentialism and the emerging church

A key feature of the existential church type is the priority it gives to authenticity and self-expression (or self-assertion), along with a rejection of rationalism and collectivism. This church type is non-institutional and non-hierarchical. It finds unity not primarily in common assent to doctrines, but in shared experiences and values. It communicates truth not in abstract propositional statements, but through corporeal and artful expression and concrete pragmatic action. One contemporary movement that represents this type is the Emerging Church.[113] While the movement is diverse, it is possible to identify some of the dominant values and practices common to its proponents in North America.[114] The Emerging Church is committed to: (1) a postmodern expression and practice of Christianity; (2) a kingdom approach to discipleship, mission, and evangelism; (3) an ecumenical openness to exploring and combining the best of diverse Christian ecclesial traditions, and (4) a sustained critique of modern North American Christianity.[115] The Emerging Church shares some common affinities with the existential church type, including its stress on individual freedom, authenticity, and expression, its epistemological suspicion of abstract and propositional truths, and its resistance of oppressive systems and collectives.

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113. For a more detailed exploration and assessment of the emerging church, see my article "John Wesley in Conversation with the Emerging Church," *Asbury Theological Journal* 63 (Spring 2008): 75–93. See also Jeff Keuss, "The Emergent Church and Neo-correlational Theology after Tillich, Schleiermacher and Browning," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61, no. 4 (2008): 450–61.

114. See online: http://www.emergentvillage.com.

115. See Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003); Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008); 70–72; Brian D. McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth that Could Change Everything* (Nashville: W. Publishing Group, 2006) and *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008); cf. the Emergent Village Website: http://www.emergentvillage.com.

Combined with its Christian convictions, these existential commitments

contribute many of its strengths. To cite just one example, the Emerging Church writers

are critical of the seeker sensitive movement for capitulating to a modern, consumerist

mindset in its evangelism strategies.[116] As Brian McLaren writes, "*Postmodern people*

don't want a God shrunken to fit modern tastes."[117] In contrast, the emergent church

movement is "a retrieval of the deep theological tradition of wrestling with the

intellectual and spiritual difficulties inherent in the Christian faith."[118] Emerging Church

leaders envision a different kind of church, one that is 'relevant' precisely because it is

authentic, one that is evangelistic precisely because it is distinctively and

unapologetically Christian. However, its affinities with existentialism also lead to some

weaknesses. These include trendiness and elitism (in some cases almost a Nietzschean

sense of superiority),[119] radical individualism,[120] carelessness or cynicism toward truth

and authority,[121] and a tendency among its adherents to express freedom in terms of

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116. Kimball distinguishes the best innovators of the seeker approach (e.g., Rick Warren) from those who employ a 'one size fits all' church strategy. See also Jones, *The New Christians*, 71.

117. Brian D. McLaren, *More Ready Than You Realize: Evangelism as Dance in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 52.

118. Jones, *The New Christians*, 109.

119. See Scott Bader-Saye, "The Emergent Matrix," *Christian Century* 121, no. 24 (2004): 20; Andy Crouch, "The Emergent Mystique," *Christianity Today* 48, no. 11 (2004): 37; Philip Harrold, "Deconversion in the Emerging Church," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6 (March, 2006), 86.

120. For example, some emerging churches practice 'mosaic' worship gatherings, in which individuals are free to wander and express themselves in whatever ways suit them (e.g., painting or sculpting, listening to music, prayer walking, labyrinths, etc.).

121. For example, Brian McLaren mines a wide spectrum of traditions and theologies in order to construct his own blend of Christian orthodoxy. While his spirit of creativity and charity is inspiring, in several instances he misrepresents the traditions from which he claims to draw. For example, McLaren is clearly not a Calvinist or a fundamentalist, yet he claims these titles for himself by redefining their meaning (even revising the acronym TULIP with words representing his own views). See Brian D. McLaren, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004). As another example, Tony Jones writes, "Whereas traditional groupings of Christians are either bounded sets (for example, Roman Catholicism or Presbyterianism—you know whether you're in or out based on membership) or centered sets (for example, Evangelicalism, which centers on certain core beliefs), emergent Christians do not have membership or doctrine to hold them together. The glue is relationship" (Jones, *The New Christians*, 56). Jones is not

liberation *from* (but not *for*) their former evangelical heritage through "narratives of disaffiliation."[122] Weighing the existential type as represented by the Emerging Church against the historic marks of the church, it prioritizes catholicity in its attempt to retrieve a connection with traditions of the ancient church and holiness in its kingdom emphasis. However, it is deficient with respect to unity and apostolicity, because its ecclesial and theological foundations are lacking.

3.   The self-perpetuation of sociobiology and the church growth movement

The main feature of the self-perpetuating church type is that the primary focus is on church preservation and growth, akin to the species and group preserving orientation posited at the centre of sociobiology. This driving focus parallels the sociobiological explanation of religious community as collective self-aggrandizement. A representative example of this type is the church growth movement, which advocates efficiency, progress through goal fulfillment, measurable growth, and the use of business models to plan and execute strategic vision and mission, programming, governance, and marketing. Time, energy, and resources are directed toward whatever contributes to the growth of the church; whatever does not contribute to organizational growth is treated as being of lesser importance. This approach has several strengths, including effective strategic planning and administration, high impact and efficiency in executing its plans, large numbers and financial leverage due to economies of scale, valuable insights concerning consumer psychology, and proficiency in casting vision and leading change.

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shallow and his point is well taken: relationships are essential to Christian faith and love is the essence of God's character. However, in response to his statement, surely Christian life together is a certain kind of relationship, one with specific shared commitments, beliefs, values, and goals?

122. Philip Harrold, "Deconversion in the Emerging Church," 84–86. Harrold cites examples of people referring to their transition to Emerging Church contexts as "outgrowing," "wrestling with," "disentangling from," or "being wrenched out of" traditional church contexts.

The greatest weakness of the self-perpetuating type is a tendency toward theological superficiality, combined with a pragmatic and uncritical adoption of business models to run the church and direct its priorities. Consequently, churches representative of this type tend to place intrinsic value on instrumental goods such as growth, efficiency, and change, while placing instrumental value on inherent goods such as spiritual formation, virtue cultivation, and social justice. In so doing, they prioritize church growth over kingdom growth (or at the very least equate them).[123] Of course, churches of this type sometimes promote and foster these latter goods, but they tend to regard them as instrumentally valuable for meeting needs and thus contributing to the bottom line of organizational growth. Moreover, they believe that such kingdom goods will be achieved as an indirect outcome of the growth of the church (rather like the capitalist belief in the invisible hand of the market, which combines and directs individual self-interests toward the common good). However this reverses the New Testament view, as evident in Jesus's kingdom parables, that kingdom growth precedes and creates authentic church growth (just as God's reign always precedes and guides faithful stewardship).[124] Moreover, the New Testament depicts the church as the sign, foretaste, and instrument of the kingdom of God.[125] This basic weakness of the self-perpetuating type leads to other problems, such as a tendency toward homogeneity rather than unity-in-diversity (the result of niche

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123. Hauerwas makes the rather stinging charge that "Current 'church growth' strategies seem intent on proving that you can get people to come to church whether or not God exists." Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company. The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 4. Hauerwas is not speaking about the intentions of church growth advocates, but is pointing out the inherent connection between media and message (i.e., draining uncomfortable Christian content creates a secularized message fostering a secularized church).

124. On this matter see George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1993), 110–17.

125. Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 101, 104, 106; Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 229.

marketing strategies) and a truncated view of mission (the focus is church expansion).[126]

Weighed against the historic marks of the church, this type values unity, holiness, and

catholicity as merely instrumental goods, while it values apostolicity as an intrinsic good

but interprets it in reductionist terms (as the call to grow and expand the church).

4.   Concentric circles of care and the sentimental church for the like-hearted

In the caring church type, the focus is on being a loving and inclusive caring

community.[127] Like the concentric circles of care model promoted by the ethics of care,

the church is envisioned as a large family or close friendship network, in which the inner

social life of the community is of primary importance. Accordingly, the community

prioritizes efforts toward strengthening relationships and community involvement while

devoting less attention to teaching doctrine or involvement in mission. It is likely to be

strong in pastoral care and counselling but may be week in the areas of preaching,

teaching, and evangelism. Its social bonds are primarily emotional or sentimental and its

tendency is to bring together people who are already like-minded and like-hearted (it is

more important to get along than to argue the finer points of theology or politics).

One strength of this type is that it provides a caring environment that prioritizes

relationships and practical care for its members. A second strength is that it focuses on

people primarily as relational beings, rather than as units of an organization,

participations in church programs, or consumers of religious goods and services. A third

126. Kevin Vanhoozer notes that C. Peter Wagner promotes the "homogeneous units principle" as an important key to church growth in his book *Our Kind of People· The Ethical Dimensions of Church Growth in America* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979). Vanhoozer comments, "Such pragmatism is clear and simple, but it results in a design for living together as church that is ultimately subevangelical and sub-Protestant to the extent that it bears witness to (*pro* + *testare*) something less than the truth of the gospel (*euangelion*), namely, that we have been made one people 'in Christ.'" Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine· A Canonical-linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 439.

127. The sentimental church for the like-hearted bears some affinity to Avery Dulles's 'mystical communion' church type (Dulles, *Models*, chapter 3).

strength is that its relational approach has appeal for contemporary people in postmodern culture who are longing for personal connection, a safe place to belong and ask questions, and support in navigating life and raising children. One weakness of the caring type is an under-emphasis on truth and doctrine, leading to a sentimental sociality that neglects an emphasis on the church as a *kingdom* community dedicated to following Jesus's teachings and seeking first God's kingdom of justice and righteousness (Matt 6:33; see chapter 8). A second weakness is group insularity and inwardness, leading to the neglect of strangers and outsiders and possibly (given the first weakness) the development of exclusive social cliques within the group. A third weakness is that this type lacks a strong sense of mission and a passion to seek and promote justice in and for the world. Weighing the caring type against the historic marks of the church, it prioritizes group unity, but is potentially weak in its understanding and practice of holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity.

D.   Concluding Summary: Two problematic areas requiring clarification by theological anthropology

The existence of rival and sometimes incommensurable accounts of being human and being in community in contemporary culture fosters at least two major problems, both of which distort our understanding of human sociality and ethical discernment and responsibility. The first problem is reductionism. Contemporary accounts tend to describe the human being in "nothing but" terms within the confines of rationalism, emotivism, biological determinism, or sentimentalism. What is lacking, for various reasons including those explored in chapter one, is a holistically nuanced and theologically "thick" (in theory and praxis) description of what it means to be human. The second problem is that

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the coexistence of these rival contemporary accounts leads to the polarization of key issues and the creation of false dualisms in our understanding and practice of community and ethics. With respect to community, we find ourselves caught between individualism and collectivism, self-fulfillment and service to others, freedom and authoritarianism, and inwardness versus an outward orientation (e.g., discipleship vs. evangelism, community relational formation vs. missional impact). Similarly, concerning ethics, we struggle to integrate personal, social, and global ethics, and find ourselves caught in polarities and dualisms, such as individual freedom versus biological determinism, rationalist rule following versus emotivist relativism (corresponding with foundationalist and existentialist epistemologies), and personal piety versus social justice. Furthermore, dualisms also confuse and frustrate the church's role in impacting culture, some of which include sacred versus secular, syncretism versus withdrawal, triumphalism versus passive defensiveness, and individual soul-saving versus societal transformation. What is needed to remedy the situation is a theologically and practically 'thick' account of what it means to be human, one which clarifies and integrates the intrinsically social-personal and ethical-spiritual character of genuine, redeemed human existence (i.e., new humanity in Christ). My proposal is that such an account would contribute to a better understanding of Christian community and ecclesiology. It would clarify the nature of the church's inner sociality and its outward mission of partnering with God to transform individuals, society, and the world, in light of God's imminent and in-breaking new creation. Thus, in the chapters that follow I will offer not simply a new and improved church type to be added to the others, but a comprehensive theological framework for understanding eccesiology in light of theological anthropology.

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Part II: Theological Anthropology in Trinitarian Perspective

Chapter 3:
The Human Person as a Relational Creature

A. Introduction

From a theological perspective, what is most distinctive about human beings is

that they are created to be in communion with God.[1] What makes human beings most

fully and uniquely human is not something they possess in and of themselves, for

example some essential nature distinguishing them from other non-human creatures.

Rather, what makes them fully and uniquely human is that *God relates to them* in a

special way as Creator, Reconciler, and Transformer.[2] This unique relationship with God

grounds and sustains human identity, purpose, and authentic existence in the world.[3] As

Miroslav Volf argues, if God's relation to human beings is "the key to their humanness,"

then their communion with God is "the key to their true identity." Thus, "They are truly

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1. As Kierkegaard puts it, "It is really the God-relationship that makes a human being a human being." Søren Kierkegaard. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, vol. 1, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 244. This idea is well supported throughout the historic Christian tradition. For example, see: Athanasius. *On the Incarnation of the Word* 4.4–6, 5.1, in *NPNF2-04: Athanasius. Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1891), 38; Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* III.1 in *ANF02. Fathers of the Second Century. Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: CCEL, 2004), 271; Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 44; Anselm, *Proslogium* (chapter 1) in *Proslogium; Monologium; An Appendix in Behalf of the Fool by Gaunilon, and Cur Deus Homo*, trans. Sidney Norton Deane (Chicago: Open Court, 1926), 4–5.

2. However, as James Peterson points out, human beings do possess an emergent capacity that makes a relationship with God possible. As Peterson puts it, "The biology of *Homo sapiens* is continuous with other hominids and the rest of life. Yet in *Homo sapiens* we find emergent capabilities that constitute a unique being. It is this being to whom God introduces God's self, making possible the bearing of the *imago Dei*, the image of God." James C. Peterson, "*Homo Sapiens* as *Homo Dei*: Paleoanthropology, Human Uniqueness, and the Image of God," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 27, no. 1 (2011): 17. So, God's relating to humans does indicate that they are distinct from the other creatures in their emergent capacities (consciousness, reasoning, morality, etc.). The point I am making is that God's relational purposes for human beings (as God's covenant partners) preceded their development. God did not choose us because we were rational, but made us rational in order to make us covenant partners.

3. Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 127, 140–43. Grenz writes, "With Adam (or 'homo sapiens') and solely with Adam, God enters into a special relationship or covenant. In this covenant God declares a new intention for creation, namely, that this creation—Adam and his offspring—fulfill a special destiny by being related to God in a way unique from all other aspects of the universe that God has made" (p. 149).

themselves when they are in communion with the Creator and Redeemer through the Spirit."[4] This primary relationship with God constitutes human beings as relational creatures that live in openness and receptivity toward the world and find partial fulfilment in the relationships they enjoy with fellow human beings.[5] Moreover, given this relational constitution, human existence is intrinsically ethical existence because a right relationship with God fosters an orientation that is attuned to God's purposes and priorities, leading to a way of living that promotes the well-being of self, others, and world. This chapter will explicate the relational character of human existence as being grounded in the love of God and reflecting the dynamic and ecstatic life of the Trinity. It will then explore some implications that this relational anthropological view has for Christian life and ethics.

B.   Trinitarian love is God's Essential Nature

1.   One God, three persons

The New Testament declares that God is love (1 John 4:8). In attesting to this, Scripture is not just telling us that love is merely an aspect of God's character or a description of how God normally acts (though both of these statements are true), but more fundamentally that love defines God's essential nature. Since love is God's essential nature, Luther argued that love properly determines God's disposition and actions toward human begins, while wrath is God's "alien work" and is always at the service of God's love. As Luther puts it, "For love's anger (wrath) seeks and wills to sunder the evil that it hates from the good that it loves, in order that the good and its love

4.   Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 133.

5.   T. F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth, 1949), 35.

may be preserved."[6] Now if love is God's *essential* nature then it must be true that love

has always characterized God, even before the creation of human beings or even

heavenly creatures. If love is essential to God's nature, then love is constitutive of the

divine life itself and God is eternally a loving Being.[7] As an essentially loving Being,

God exists not as an isolated individual deity but in the eternal communion of Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, the One God exists as three subsisting persons; and, as three

divine persons-in-relation, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit subsist eternally as the One

God. Of course, our knowledge of God's trinitarian existence as Father, Son, and Holy

Spirit derives not from theological speculation about the abstract noun 'love,' but from

the biblical declaration that "God is love" interpreted by the historic Christian tradition in

the light of the scriptural narratives that record the Incarnation, life (and teaching), death,

Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit at

Pentecost. In other words, it is not that we first theorize a general idea about what 'love'

is and then project it onto God (as Feuerbach would have it). Rather, God through the

person of Jesus Christ uniquely reveals God's self to us and thereby demonstrates and

imparts Love to us in the Holy Spirit.[8] The biblical writers began to reflect on the reality

and implications of the Incarnation for their understanding of God, as they moved from

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6.   Quoted in Dennis Ngien, *The Suffering of God According to Martin Luther's Theologia Crucis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1995), 107.

7.   John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 46.

8.   For example, see the following passages: John 17:26; Rom 5:5; Gal 5:22; Eph 3:16–19; 2 Tim 1:7; 1 John 3:16, 4:10–12. Theologically, this statement depends on the affirmation that the Son and the Spirit are of one being or substance (*homoousion*) with the Father. See Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (New York: T & T Clark, 1996), 80, 98, 127.

the monotheism of the Old Testament to an emerging proto-trinitarian theology in the

New Testament, which the early church fathers subsequently explicated and developed.[9]

The insight that God is love led Augustine to formulate his mutual love model of

the Trinity. According to Augustine's mutual love model, the Father eternally generates

the Son (without beginning or end) and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the

Son and subsists as their mutual love.[10] Augustine begins his discussion with a reflection

on the nature of love as depicted in 1 John 4:16: "God is love, and those who abide in

love abide in God, and God abides in them." He discovers that love implies a Trinity of

relationships and can serve as something of an analogy for the Triune God: "There you

are with three, the lover, what is being loved, and love. And what is love but a kind of life

coupling or trying to couple together two things, namely lover and what is being

loved?"[11] This analogy does not espouse tritheism, as if there are three gods loving each

other, but rather illustrates that God *is* love and as such exists in complexity and

differentiation. In contrast, human beings image God in this manner only in a partial

sense, for, as Augustine says, "it is not the case that anyone who loves himself is love

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9.   It is beyond the scope of the present dissertation to recount in detail the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity, explaining how the early church came to interpret Scripture with the aid of tradition, reason, and experience of the Risen Christ through the Holy Spirit. Concerning such themes, I recommend the following books: Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy. An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); David Coffey, *Deus Trinitas· The Doctrine of the Triune God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Grenz, *Theology*, 53–71; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1. (especially chapter 5), trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); and Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*.

10.   See Steven M. Studebaker, *Jonathan Edwards' Social Augustinian Trinitarianism in Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2008), 109–34, "Integrating Pneumatology and Christology: A Trinitarian Modification of Clark H. Pinnock's Spirit Christology." *Pneuma* 28, no. 1 (2006): 12, and "Jonathan Edwards's Social *Augustinian* Trinitarianism: an Alternative to a Recent Trend," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56, no. 3 (2003): 272. Note that Augustine does not here de-personalize the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit's role is active not passive. See Augustine, *The Trinity* XV/5.36, vol. 5 *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle (New York: New City, 1991), 424.

11.   Augustine, *The Trinity* VIII/5.14 (p. 255).

except when love loves itself."[12] For the human individual, love is not its own subject,

but only gains transcendence in the encounter with another human person. However,

Augustine implies that there is inter-subjectivity within God, because in God (and in God

alone) "love loves itself."[13] Love takes on such an all-encompassing reality as to become

a transcendent Subject.

To depict simultaneously the essential unity of God and the inter-relatedness of

Father, Son, and Spirit, the Greek fathers of the early church employed the crucial

concept of *perichoresis*.[14] This term was first used by Gregory of Naziansus to express

the way in which the divine and human natures in the one person of Christ co-inhered

without the integrity of either being diminished. In subsequent Cappadocian theology,

perichoresis came to depict the mutual indwelling, co-inhering, or inter-penetrating of

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[15] As Catherine Mowry LaCugna explains it, *perichoresis*

illustrates that the three persons "mutually inhere in one another, draw life from one

another, 'are' what they are by relation to one another."[16] According to T. F. Torrance,

this move had deep and far reaching implications not only for the Christian understanding

of God but also for the Christian understanding of personhood (with ripple effects

influencing the development of modern conceptions of personhood).[17] Specifically, by

admitting the category of 'relation' into the concept of 'being' the Cappadocians

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12.   Augustine, *The Trinity* IV/1.2 (p. 272).

13.   Augustine, *The Trinity* IV/1.2 (p. 272).

14.   T. F. Torrance writes, "In the perichoretic Communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit who are the one Being of God, Unity and Trinity, Trinity and Unity mutually permeate and actively pass into one another" (*The Christian Doctrine of God*, 179).

15.   See Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 88–102.

16.   Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993). Quoted in Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 317.

17.   Zizioulas makes the even stronger claim that the person "as a concept and as a living reality is purely the product of patristic thought" (*Being as Communion*, 27).

reconceived being itself (*ousia*) in dynamic and relational terms. In the new Christian understanding, "With God, Being and Communion are one and the same" and being could now be conceived as being-in-relation.[18] Torrance summarizes,

> It was in connection with this refined conception of *perichoresis* in its employment to speak of the intra-trinitarian relations in God, that Christian theology developed what I have long called its *onto-relational* concept of the divine Persons, or an understanding of the three divine Persons in the one God in which the ontic relations between them belong to what they essentially are in themselves in their distinctive *hypostases*. Along with this there developed out of the doctrine of the Trinity the new *concept of person*, unknown in human thought until then, according to which the relations between persons belong to what persons are.[19]

This new understanding of being and personhood distinguished Christian thinking from classical Greek ontology in which being (*ousia*) had been conceived as something static and unchanging, as for example in Aristotle's distinction between 'substances' and 'accidents' and his restriction of 'relation' to the latter category. Conversely, in the Christian view both God and human beings are conceived in relational and personal terms. Both God and human beings are regarded as persons-in-relationship (though as we will discuss shortly, there are important limitations to this correspondence between divine and human persons).

2.   God's redemptive mission is grounded in God's nature as love

In recent years many theologians have attempted to recover an emphasis on missiology by articulating its significance for our understanding of God, Christian life, and ecclesiology. For example, the missional church literature describes God as a missional or sending God. Just as the Father sent the Son and the Spirit into the world to accomplish the *missio Dei* (mission of God), so now God sends the church into the world

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18.   Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 104. See also Zizioulas's discussion in *Being as Communion,* 27–46.

19.   Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God,* 102.

as "God's instrument for God's mission."[20] While this renewed emphasis on mission is welcome and helpful, it is important to remember and assert that God's redemptive mission is grounded more fundamentally in God's nature as love. In other words, God's mission to redeem the world flows from God's prior love for creation. God's love for creation is rooted, in turn, in the other-centered, ecstatic, perichoretic love that constitutes God's triune being and reflects the fullness and over-flowing quality of the divine life. That such love essentially characterizes the Trinity means that God created the world and human beings not to satisfy some deficiency or lack within God, but as a free act of divine self-giving. Likewise, out of the same love, God acts redemptively to heal and restore human beings when they defy God's intentions and suffer the consequences of sin. Finally, through loving personal interaction with creation and covenant partnership with human beings, God is drawing all things toward eschatological transformation and fulfilment. God therefore demonstrates and enacts the loving being and character of the Trinity in creating, reconciling, and transforming all things through Christ in the Spirit.[21]

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20. See, for example, Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 6–8.

21. This all depends on their being a correspondence between God's being and God's act, the demonstration of which is one of the most important contributions of trinitarian theology. Torrance writes, "If there is no real bond *in God* between the economic Trinity and the ontological Trinity, the saving events proclaimed in the economy of the Gospel are without any divine validity and the doctrine of the Trinity is lacking in any ultimate divine truth. The trinitarian message of the Gospel tells us that the very contrary is the case, for in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit we really have to do with the *Lord God himself* as our Saviour" (*The Christian Doctrine of God*, 7–8). This highlights the significance of Rahner's now famous axiom that the "'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity." See Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 22.

C.   Trinitarian Love is Constitutive of the Human Person

1.   The *imago Dei* and being in relationship

According to Stanley Grenz, "no assertion moves us closer to the heart of our human identity and our essential nature than does the declaration, 'We are created in the divine image.'"[22] Due to the importance and intricacy of the concept of the *imago Dei*, theologians have for centuries debated its precise meaning. Three general approaches represent the dominant views that theologians have proposed. The first, which Grenz calls the "structural" approach, describes the image of God as referring to some capacity or endowment that humans possess inherently, such as rationality or freedom of the will.[23] The second approach is the relational interpretation of the *imago Dei*, which claims that human beings reflect God's image by being in relationship with God and other human beings.[24] A third major approach interprets the image of God as a task or vocation to be accomplished or as a goal or destiny to be reached.[25] In my view, each of these approaches has biblical roots and contributes something meaningful to our understanding of what it means for human beings to be created after the image of God, but the relational interpretation of the *imago Dei* takes *theological* precedence over the other two views.[26] An implication of this recognition is that a right relationship with God

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22.   Grenz, *Theology*, 168.

23.   Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 142–60.

24.   Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 162–77.

25.   Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 177–82.

26.   While exegetes continue to debate the precise meaning of the image of God, I maintain that a relational interpretation is *theologically* primary. For example, many exegetes believe that the immediate context of Genesis 1:26–27 favours the vocational view because the passage closely associates the image of God with the calling to exercise stewardship over the earth and its creatures. This argument is surely correct in its observation that the vocation to exercise stewardship is crucially linked with the divine image, yet it fails to account for the fact that the very notion of stewardship entails and depends upon a unique *relationship* between the steward and the King. It is in virtue of their special relationship to God that human beings can serve as appropriate vice regents, a relationship which enables both human reasoning (awakened by God's Word-address) and faithful stewardship (reflecting God's character and purposes). Thus, while

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orients and enables human beings to enjoy healthy and life-giving relationships with

other human beings, to employ their reason in the service of genuine truth and thus attain

not merely rationality but wisdom (see chapter 4), and to exercise responsibly their

vocation to sustain, restore, and improve themselves and their world as faithful stewards

of God's creation (see chapter 5).[27]

The relational interpretation in contemporary theology has its immediate

historical roots in the thought of the Protestant Reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin,

both of whom interpreted the *imago Dei* in terms of being in a right moral and spiritual

relationship with God.[28] According to Luther, the righteousness that is connected to the

image of God is dynamic and active, rather than a static possession of the human person,

because for Luther righteousness is not something humans possess in and of themselves

but consists in being morally and spiritually justified before God.[29] For Luther the *imago*

is not just the capacity to know and love God but the right ordering and functioning of

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vocation helps to specify the content of the relationship and thus clarify one aspect of the *imago Dei*, it is neither theologically prior to nor conceptually determinative.

27.   Anselm combines stewardship, rationality, and relationship in his helpful summary statement: "Lord, I acknowledge and I thank thee that thou hast created me in this thine image, in order that I may be mindful of thee, may conceive of thee, and love thee. . . ." Anselm, *Proslogium* (chapter 1), 4–5.

28.   See Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 162–69. The original roots of the relational interpretation go back much further to medieval and patristic thinkers, such as Anselm, Augustine, and Athanasius (see footnote #1).

29.   The so-called Finish interpretation of Luther emphasizes that Christ is really present in faith, which highlights the link between justification and union with Christ leading to a more participatory view of righteousness than the traditional 'forensic' interpretation allows. See, for example, Tuomo Mannermaa, *Christ Present in Faith: Luther's View of Justification*, ed. Kirsi Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005). While interesting and potentially fruitful for understanding the link between justification and sanctification, this position has not yet obtained general consensus in Luther scholarship. Whether it does so still remains to be seen. (See: Carl E. Braaten, "The Finnish Breakthrough in Luther Research," *Pro Ecclesia*, 5 [Spring 1996]: 141–43; see also Matt Jenson's review of the book in the *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 [Oct. 2005]: 482–85). One objection raised by critics is that it does not adequately account for Luther's historical context (e.g., his polemic against Rome concerning the selling of indulgences, the authority of the Pope, the critical law-gospel distinction, etc.). Another is that Mannermaa's interpretation relies too heavily on Luther's commentary on Galatians in isolation from Luther's other works. For our present purposes, it is perhaps best to see Luther emphasizing both forensic righteousness and transformation in union with Christ. Luther explores both of these themes, and their interrelation, in his treatise *On Christian Liberty*, trans. W. A. Lambert and Harold J. Grimm (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

human reason and will, which results from justification and enables human beings

actually to know and love God.[30] In their created, pre-fallen state, Adam and Eve were

naturally justified before God and exercised their freedom and reason in openness to and

trust in God. Luther believed that the image of God was distorted in the Fall, because the

relationship of human beings to God was corrupted. The image is regained when people

come to saving faith in Christ, through which they are justified by grace and receive

Christ's own righteousness (an 'alien' righteousness that is imputed to them). While

Luther's understanding of the *imago* was implicitly relational, Calvin was explicit in

interpreting the image of God as referring to a relationship with God.[31] Like Luther,

Calvin stressed the dynamic quality of the *imago* but associated it with the actual act of

reflecting God as an intelligible response to God's Word.[32] Specifically, Calvin proposed

that human beings image God when they reflect God's glory and character with integrity

and thus genuinely resemble their Creator. When human beings live in such a manner

God looks at them and sees God's own image, as if God were gazing into a mirror. Thus,

imaging or mirroring God depends on being properly oriented toward God. With Luther,

Calvin maintained that the image of God was distorted by the Fall. In their fallen state,

human beings are alienated from God and live in a state of pervasive depravity. For

Calvin, restoration of the image is given in and through Christ, who as the Word of God

and the second Adam reflects the perfect image of God. In summary, the Reformers made

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30. Bayer argues that for Luther "the human being is human *insofar as* he is justified through faith — *in that* he is justified by faith." He explains that Luther envisioned human uniqueness as being grounded in a faith relationship to God, in particular by being consciously (in faith) dependent on God for life and sustenance, rather than subsisting on their own strength. Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 155–58.

31. Grenz, *Theology*, 166.

32. Torrance clarifies that "strictly speaking, it is God who images Himself in man, and that means that He graciously embraces man as His child in Christ the express Image of his glory. It is as man answers this gracious decision in love and faith that he bears the image of God." Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 35 (original italics removed).

a significance twofold contribution to the recovery of the relational interpretation of the *imago Dei*: first, their observation that the image of God refers to a dynamic relationship rather than a static possession; and second, their observation that imaging God means reflecting God's glory and moral character in one's own life. Although human sin distorts and corrupts the image of God in human beings, it never completely destroys it. Human beings constantly turn away from God, but God perseveres in lovingly pursuing human beings.[33]

Luther and Calvin inaugurated the recovery of the relational interpretation of the *imago Dei*, especially as referring to the spiritual and moral relationship of human beings to their Creator.[34] In the modern period, the first theologian to develop the personal and person-constituting implications of the *imago Dei* was Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *Creation and Fall*.[35] In contrast to many traditional attempts to ground the image of God

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33. This affirmation is strengthened by an emphasis on God's prevenient grace (divine grace preceding human decision), which establishes the possibility of saving faith, and by a corresponding emphasis on the universal scope of the Spirit's mission in drawing people to the Risen Christ. See Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover A Theology of God's Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), and Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

34. Calvin says that the God-human relationship grounds inter-human relationships and enables such relationships to reflect God's glory. "Because men have been created for such intercourse and communion with God, they have intercourse and society among themselves so that their life in community, characterized by rectitude [meaning constant dependence upon God], may image the glory of God" (Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*, 51; original italics removed). At the same time, Calvin argues that "though the divine glory is displayed in man's outward appearance, it cannot be doubted that the proper seat of the image is in the soul." He goes on to argue that "our definition of the image seems not to be complete until it appears more clearly what the faculties are in which man excels, and in which he is to be regarded as a mirror of the divine glory." Calvin then highlights knowledge, righteousness, and holiness and infers that "the image of God was manifested by light of intellect, rectitude of heart, and the soundness of every part." And finally, the image "is properly the internal good of the soul." See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* I.XV.3–4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 162–65. Calvin's view of the image seems therefore to relate primarily to the individual, though with relational (inter-personal) implications.

35. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1–3*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax, vol. 3, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997). The book is based on Bonhoeffer's 1932 lectures at Berlin and was published the following year. The classic academic treatment of the centrality of sociality in Bonhoeffer's thought is Clifford J. Green, *Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). See also his recent essay, "Sociality, Discipleship, and Worldly Theology in Bonhoeffer's Christian Humanism," in *Being Human, Becoming*

in human innate capacity or potential, Bonhoeffer innovatively interpreted the *imago Dei* in terms of an *analogia relationis* (an analogy of relationship).[36] Bonhoeffer unpacks his relational analogy in two directions. First, the analogy describes the vertical relationship that human beings have with God, a relationship which is characterized by genuine freedom and reciprocal love. Bonhoeffer writes, "To say that in humankind God creates the image of God on earth means that humankind is like the Creator in that it is free."[37] Yet Bonhoeffer asserts that this freedom should not be understood as a substance or quality that humans possess in and for themselves, but as something they have *for God and others* by virtue of their relationship with the Creator. He notes that God demonstrates God's own freedom in freely binding himself to human beings in covenant love.[38] In addition, the quality of life that the Holy Spirit imparts to human beings (by the Spirit's life-breath) constitutes and continually opens their genuine freedom to love and worship God, so that: "In the free creature the Holy Spirit worships the Creator; uncreated freedom glorifies itself in view of created freedom. The creature loves the Creator, because the Creator loves the creature."[39] Thus, the vertical dimension of the *imago Dei* means that God created human beings in freedom so that they could freely reciprocate God's love. As Bonhoeffer asserts, "only such an image, in its freedom,

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Human Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Social Thought, ed. Jens Zimmermann and Brian Gregor (Eugene. OR: Pickwick, 2010), 71–90.

36. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 65. Incidentally, Karl Barth appropriated Bonhoeffer's *analogia relationis* in his 1942 Doctrine of Creation. See Barth, "The Work of Creation." vol. 3/1 of *Church Dogmatics. The Doctrine of Creation* (London: T & T Clark, 2009).

37. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 62.

38. God's demonstrates covenant love for human beings both in creation and redemption. Bonhoeffer observes that in the second chapter of Genesis Yahweh fashions humankind with his own hands, which Bonhoeffer believes expresses the physical nearness of the Creator to the creature. Elsewhere Bonhoeffer writes, "it is the message of the gospel itself that God's freedom has bound itself to us, that God's free grace becomes real with us alone, that God wills not be free for God's self but for humankind. Because God in Christ is free for humankind, because God does not keep God's freedom to God's self, we can think of freedom only as a 'being free for . . .'" (*Creation and Fall*, 63).

39. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 64.

would fully praise God, would fully proclaim God's glory as Creator."[40] Moreover, since

the image is a relation and not a possession, it exists only insofar as humanity points to or

illustrates God's love and character. Bonhoeffer asserts that the analogy or likeness "must

be understood very strictly in the sense that what is like derives its likeness *only* from the

prototype, so that it always points us only to the prototype itself and is 'like' it only in

pointing to it in this way."[41]

Second, the *imago Dei* as a relational analogy describes the horizontal

relationships that human beings enjoy with one another. This observation stems from

Bonhoeffer's reflection on Genesis 1:26–27, which brings the concept of the *imago Dei*

into close proximity with the creation of human beings as male and female. Bonhoeffer

writes, "And God created them man and woman. The human being is not alone. Human

beings exist in duality, and it is in this dependence on the other that their creatureliness

consists."[42] While the vertical relationship with God constitutes the human creature as a

relational being, it does not yet bring the human being to fulfilment and completion. This

does not indicate a deficiency in the Creator-creature relationship, but rather reflects

God's deliberate design for human beings. In creating human beings in the duality of

male and female, God intended that they live together in reciprocal love and

interdependence.[43] As Pannenberg helpfully clarifies, God created the first human, Adam,

to be an 'exocentric' creature, a being which finds its center and completion outside of

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40. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 61 (emphasis added).
41. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 65.
42. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 64.
43. Clifford Green summarizes Bonhoeffer's position: "Since God's being is being-for-humanity, so human relationships image this in one person 'being-free-for-the-other' in love." Clifford Green, "Human Sociality and Christian Community," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed. John W. de Gruchy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 117.

itself in its openness to the world and in its relation to God and others.[44] Grenz similarly

proposes that the theological significance of human sexuality points to the essentially

exocentric, other-orienting and mutually completing character of human existence as

male and female.[45] As such, the lone figure of Adam represents a not-yet-fully-human

creature yearning for completion.[46] Bonhoeffer argues that the creation of Eve from

Adam's own human flesh means that she is a unique and special gift; she is one with

Adam as a being-in-relationship, an equal partner and co-ruler over creation.

Consequently, the fact that Eve is created from Adam's flesh does not elicit pride in

Adam but profound joy and humility, as demonstrated by Adam's grateful exclamation,

"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!" (Gen 2:23). Bonhoeffer writes,

"Adam knows that he is bound in a wholly new way to this Eve who is derived from him.

This bond is best described in the expression: he now belongs to her, because she belongs

to him. They are now no longer without each other; they are one and yet two."[47] Adam

and Eve are united together as "one flesh" (Gen 2:24), yet they retain their individuality

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44. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 43–79. See also Grenz, *Theology*, 130–32, 139–43 and F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 90–91, 236–37.

45. Grenz writes, "At the heart of human sexuality is embodiment, which includes the sexed body that marks a person as male or female and out of which other aspects of human existence emerge. Bound up with embodiment is the sense of incompleteness, coupled with the drive for completeness, that together lead to bonding. Sexuality, therefore, is the dynamic that draws human beings out of their individual isolation into relationships with others." Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 301. For Grenz's full discussion of human sexuality and its relation to the *imago Dei* see pp. 267–303. See also Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Pasadena: Fuller Seminary Press, 1982), 104–29.

46. Alistair I. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 32. As Ray Anderson expresses it, "Adam is not a 'completed human' by virtue of being an example or instance of individuated humanity, even in relation to God. Rather, being related to God and being determined by God, Adam cannot be complete without encountering himself in the other as one who is 'bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.' There is a differentiation of creatureliness itself which is constitutive of the human, not merely differentiation between the human and the non-human, or even differentiation between the human and God." Anderson, *On Being Human*, 48.

47. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 97.

and uniqueness.[48] They encounter each other in unity and distinction and exist both for-each-other and over-against each other. To be clear, Bonhoeffer's point that is not that the image of God is fulfilled in male-female marital relations, but that the basic male-female duality that we observe in Genesis illustrates the way we are called to relate, specifically by being free-for-others in other-centered love and joined together in a communion that is built upon the distinction of persons.

In addition, Bonhoeffer expounds humanity's freedom to rule over creation from the *analogia relationis*. While freedom over against other human beings should be understood as freedom *for* one another, freedom over against the created world should be understood as freedom *from* creation (i.e., humanity's dominion over it).[49] This is not a freedom devoid of responsibility and care for creation—indeed, stewardship and service are inseparable:

> [T]his freedom to rule includes being bound to the creatures who are ruled. The ground and the animals over which I am lord constitute the world in which I live, without which I cease to be. It is my world, my earth, over which I rule. I am not free from it in any sense of my essential being, my spirit, having no need of nature, as though nature were something alien to the spirit. On the contrary, in my whole being, in my creatureliness, I belong wholly to this world; its bears me, nurtures me, holds me.[50]

Thus, Bonhoeffer's relational approach to the *imago Dei* focuses on human relationships with God and other human beings, but it also has implications for faithful stewardship of the earth and the non-human other. His view is consistent with the one I will develop in chapter five, which states that human beings are called to sustain, restore, and improve themselves and their world.

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48. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 98.
49. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 66.
50. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 66.

Bonhoeffer's analysis adds a personal and person-constituting aspect to the *imago Dei* and thus contributes a new dimension to the relational view espoused by Luther and Calvin. Bonhoeffer also rightly grounds his theological reflection on the incarnation and Christology. However, his explication is not yet fully trinitarian. A trinitarian interpretation of the *imago Dei* reasons that if God exists eternally in communion as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then human beings image God not merely as individuals but as persons in communion. Grenz articulates the view clearly as follows:

> As the doctrine of the Trinity asserts, throughout all eternity God is community, namely, the fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who comprise the triune God. The creation of humankind in the divine image, therefore, can mean nothing less than that humans express the relational dynamic of the God whose representation we are called to be.[51]

While a trinitarian theology of the human person takes its initial cue from Genesis 1:26–27, it does not depend exclusively on the exegesis of this passage. Rather, given a complete canonical reading of Scripture, which attests to God's economic and progressive self-revelation to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, it employs a trinitarian hermeneutic to the reading of all Scripture, including the first two chapters of Genesis. In other words, a trinitarian view does not have to find the Trinity in Genesis through strict exegesis, but it can affirm *theologically* that the God of Genesis is indeed the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Moreover, a trinitarian interpretation of the *imago Dei* derives from New Testament Christology, particularly the declaration that only Jesus Christ, the Son of God, reflects God's image fully and with complete integrity (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3). We can come to reflect God's image only by being in relationship with God "in Christ," whereby we are gradually transformed into Christ's image (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; 1 John 3:2) as we put on the new self that is created to be like God

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51. Grenz, *Theology*, 179.

(Eph 4:24; Col 3:9–10). Further, being "in Christ" means being in communion with others who are also "in Christ" as members of Christ's Body, the church (Rom 12:4–5; 1 Cor 12:12–13; Eph 4:4–6). As Grenz argues, "Only in fellowship with others can we show forth what God is like, for God is the community of love. . . ."[52] Miroslav Volf somewhat playfully puts it this way,

> Because the Christian God is not a lonely God, but rather a communion of the three persons, faith leads human beings into the divine *communio*. One cannot, however, have a self-enclosed communion with the triune God—a 'foursome,' as it were—for the Christian God is not a private deity. Communion with this God is at once also communion with those others who have entrusted themselves in faith to the same God. Hence one and the same act of faith places a person into a new relationship both with God and with all others who stand in communion with God.[53]

Thus, from a New Testament perspective, being in the image of God means more specifically being in the image of Christ, which entails a relationship with Christ and with other human beings who are "in Christ" in the bond of the Spirit. Though we do not yet experience the full measure of the communion that God ultimately intends for us, we can by faith in Christ and participation in his Body experience it now in some measure, as a foretaste and deposit of what is to come. As Volf argues, "Present participation in the trinitarian *communio* through faith in Jesus Christ anticipates in history the eschatological communion of the church with the triune God."[54] It is important to clarify that human beings do not reflect the divine image simply by being in a group with others. For example, a group of workers forming a single crew and working on a common project is not a fitting analogy for the Trinity, but an overly simplistic form of social trinitarianism

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52. Grenz, *Theology*, 179.
53. Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 173.
54. Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 129.

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lurking dangerously close to trithesism or polytheism.[55] The trinitarian view is not simply

a reactionary move away from individualism toward collectivism. Rather, it points to the

exocentric quality of each human being, which cries out for relational completion in God

and others. In other words, in the trinitarian interpretation of the *imago Dei*, the image of

God belongs neither to the human being as an individual nor to human beings as a group,

but to the intrinsic sociality of the human being, to the human *person-in-relation* who is

bound to others "in Christ" by the Spirit. What I am proposing, therefore, is a modified

form of social trinitarianism that proceeds not simply from Trinity to human community,

but from Trinity through anthropology and soteriology to ecclesial community.[56]

2.   The importance of relationships in the broad biblical narrative

Thus far we have explored the relational implications of the biblical affirmation

that human beings are created in the image of God. We also noted briefly that the *imago*

Dei is not just a part of our past, but that it also orients our present and directs us to our

future "in Christ" by the Spirit. As crucial as the *imago Dei* is for understanding human

personhood, it is important to see the significance of relationships in the entire biblical

narrative, particularly in its threefold movement from creation to redemption to

eschatological transformation. In this section, I will reflect broadly (and briefly) on the

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55 . While Gregory of Nyssa's work *On Not Three Gods* is sometimes regarded as espousing such a simple form of social trinitarianism, such is a misinterpretation of his argument. Gregory's purpose is to disprove tritheism by arguing that the unity of divine operations infers a unity of nature. All of God's actions have their origin in the Father, proceed through the Son, and are perfected in the Holy Spirit. See Lewis Ayres, "On not three people: The fundamental themes of Gregory of Nyssa's Trinitarian theology as seen in To Ablabius: On Not Three Gods," *Modern Theology* 18 (Oct. 2002): 445–74. See also Miroslav Volf, "Being as God Is: Trinity and Generosity," in *God's Life in Trinity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 5–7.

56. Volf argues similarly in *After Our Likeness*, 199–200. Moreover, he argues that the analogy between Trinity and church must be conditioned by the doctrines of creation (we correspond only in creaturely fashion) and eschatology (we will experience fully communion with God and one another only at the *eschaton*). For a good critique of more simplistic forms of social trinitarianism, see John L. Gresham, Jr., "The Social Model of the Trinity and its Critics," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46, no. 3 (1993): 325–43.

relational aspects of Christian life as a whole. In the next section (D), I will provide a more detailed reflection on the existential, philosophical, and theological-ethical aspects and implications of a relational interpretation of creation, fall, redemption, and eschatological transformation.

From a theological perspective, what makes human beings uniquely human is God's commitment to relate to them in a threefold way. First, God created human beings for communion with God and fellow human beings. In the Genesis account, God's creative activity begins with the creation of the material universe, followed by the separation of sky and sea, water and land, leading to the creation of life—plants, birds, animals, and creatures of the sea. God pronounces each progressive stage of creation "good." But after creating human beings on the sixth day God is particularly satisfied and declares the whole of creation now to be "very good." What is most noteworthy about the story for our present purposes is that God is not fully satisfied with creation until God has an appropriate counterpart to share it with, namely a human being. God is like an expectant parent preparing a child's room (actually the whole house) in advance in joyous delight and excited anticipation of its birth. While God is pleased to have a new steward and accordingly blesses the human being to exercise dominion, the discovery of a suitable ruler or manager cannot fully account for the extent of God's exuberance. What God is most happy about is the novel existence of a being who is not God, with whom God can personally and uniquely relate.[57] In a similar way, the creature Adam is not fully satisfied until God creates a special and unique counterpart for him, the female Eve, at whose creation Adam is similarly exuberant and appropriately grateful to the Creator.

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57. I am speaking somewhat poetically here. To be clear, God creates freely out of the overflowing fullness of God's own trinitarian life, not out of necessity or any sense of lack. On this point, see Colin E. Gunton, *The Christian Faith: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 4–6.

Thus, God created human beings to be in relationship with God and this relationship with God properly orients and aligns human relationships with one another and with the created world.

Second, when human beings rebel and become alienated from God and each other God acts to reconcile and restore their lost communion.[58] Amazingly, God chose to restore human beings in the most intimate and personal way imaginable—by becoming one of them (John 1:14) and by dying as one of them (Phil 2:5–11). By means of his Incarnation, life, death, Resurrection, and Ascension, God the Son reconciles us to the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit, who unites us to Christ and thereby draws us into fellowship with God and one another. Through faith in Christ, we become partakers in his death and share in his resurrection, thus dying to sin and rising to new life in the Spirit (Rom 6, 8; Phil 3). While such faith is in one sense an individual act, it is also mediated by others, encouraged and built up in and by the faith community.[59] For it is in the faith community that we come to know, together with all the saints, how wide, long, high, and deep God's love for us really is (Eph 3:18). Moreover, in this community we are not just passive recipients or casual associates, but active and integral members of Christ's Body bound together by love in harmony, the peace of Christ ruling in our hearts (Col 3:14–15).

Third, God transforms human beings for holistic and abundant communion with God and fellow human beings. Several passages in Scripture depict our final redemption in relational terms. For example, Jesus uses the image of a banquet to describe the final coming together of God with all of God's people (Matt 8:11–12, 22:1–14; Luke 14:15–

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58. Grenz says that "the fundamental result of sin is the loss of community" (*Theology*, 207).

59. See also Volf's discussion of the dialectic between the ecclesial mediation and the individual independence of faith (*After Our Likeness*, 160–71).

24). The book of Revelation portrays all believers collectively as Christ's bride yet at the same time as individuals attending the wedding feast of the Lamb (19:6–9; 21:2, 9ff; 22:17). Moreover, it tells us that God's eschatological kingdom will bring together people from every tribe, language, people, and nation (6:9). In addition, Revelation describes the final dwelling place of the redeemed as a city filled by God and characterized by love, peace, wisdom, honour, and glory (Rev 21:22–27). Thus, the promise of Scripture is that the relational transformation we experience in the present life through our restoration together in Christ is just a foretaste of what is to come.

D.   Love and the Relational Ethical Dimension

In a Christian worldview, theology and ethics, while distinct, are closely related and interwoven in such a way as to be mutually implying and enriching.[60] Faith and action go hand in hand. When Jesus called his disciples, he did not merely beckon them to "listen to me" or "believe what I believe" but rather to *"follow me"* (of course, following Jesus required and assumed basic trust, belief, and a desire to learn and grow). In Paul's letters the indicatives of God's love and grace precede the imperatives of obedience and faithful living, yet in order for Christians to understand God's love and grace fully they must begin to walk in it (e.g., Gal 6:7–10; Eph 4:17–32, 5:15–20; Phil 3:12–16; Col 3:12). Similarly, the first letter of John prioritizes God's love and grace over human merit (4:9–10) yet also stresses that genuine fellowship with God and others requires "living in the light" (1:7), renouncing sin (1:8–10), and obeying God's commands (2:3–6). Thus, as Bonhoeffer notes, the Christian life involves a dialectic of

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60.   Hauerwas argues that theological claims are already ethical claims. "For theology is a practical activity concerned to display how Christian convictions construe the self and world. Therefore, theological claims concerning the relation of creation and redemption are already ethical claims, since they situate how one works methodologically." Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 55.

moving between believing and obeying, receiving and giving, in stillness and in action: *"only the believers obey, and only the obedient believe."*[61] "Christian community is not an ideal we have to realize, but rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate."[62] "All Christian thinking, speaking, and organizing must be born anew out of . . . prayer and [righteous] action."[63] Accordingly, in this section (and in the corresponding ethics sections of chapters 4–8) we are not leaving theology behind but interweaving theology with implications for Christian ethics.

1.   God's creating love awakens a reciprocal human love response

Wolfhart Pannenberg observes that a primary characteristic of human existence is openness to the world.[64] In distinction from much of the animal world (though not in absolute distinction), human beings have sufficient biological complexity to enable them to transcend the givenness of their natural environment, to stretch toward ever expanding potential, and to reach for infinite possibilities. Human beings have the ability to change themselves and the world around them. They are continually on the move, continually self-defining and world-defining. Corresponding with this openness to the world is the human capacity for self-consciousness and transcendence. The human being is unique in the natural world in that the human self is a *relation*; the human self is a self relating to itself.[65] In other words, the human self is a synthesis in which a subject (I) relates to itself

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61.   Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, ed. Geffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss, vol. 4, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 63 (emphasis original).

62.   Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, ed. Geffrey B. Kelly, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness, vol. 5, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 38.

63.   Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 300.

64.   Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 43–79; cf. Grenz, *Theology*, 130–32.

65.   Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Edification and Awakening*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 43.

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as an object (me). This means that human self-identity is both dialectical (actively and passively being and becoming) and temporal (oriented to past, present, and future). It is both a gift to be received and a goal to be attained. Thus, the human being is characterized by what Pannenberg calls 'exocentricity,' a term which defines the self's relational constitution as being both centered and other-oriented. As F. LeRon Shults explains it, "'Exocentric' refers to the idea that to be a self involves a being centered outside oneself through the mediation of knowing (and being known by) the other, while at the same time being centrally organized by the agency of the ego."[66] In its inner centeredness the self is relatively stable. In its other-orientation the self is malleable and subject to adaptation and change. All of this means that humans are by nature constituted as relational beings that gain their identity through a continual, dialectical negotiation of the self with itself, the world, and other human selves—a process which Miroslav Volf calls 'differentiation.'[67] One's true identity, therefore, is neither exclusively one's inner essence (who I am inside, my soul) nor one's outer relations (what others and the world make of me), but rather a kind of ongoing journey or quest of being and becoming, identity and otherness, stability and change, initiative and receptivity. Practically speaking, our relationships shape and affect who we are essentially as persons, though they are not fully determinative of our identity or personhood.[68] For example, becoming a husband and a father does not merely provide me with a new set of associations with corresponding responsibilities and tasks; it fundamentally changes my personal identity

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66.   Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 90.

67 .   Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace. A Theological Explanation of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 64–66.

68.   Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 186.

in an essential but not fully determinative way (too many women throughout history have

had their identities over-determined by their relational orientation as wife and mother).[69]

Theologically, what constitutes human beings in their creatureliness as self-

conscious, transcendent, exocentric, relational beings is the personal address of God's

Word.[70] Human beings are uniquely the creatures to whom God intelligibly and lovingly

speaks and from whom God desires an intelligible and loving response. God created

human beings to be self-transcending relational creatures who "come into themselves"

both by receiving their identity as a gracious gift from God and by actively responding to

God's call to define and shape their lives in faithful response to God's Word.[71] Thus, in

one sense human beings do not create themselves because only God gives and orients

life. The same Word of address that constitutes them as relational beings also constitutes

them as responsible beings, who are accountable before God for their lives and who

encounter in both God and others ethical claims and limits on their existence.[72] In another

sense though, human beings do 'create' themselves because God's creational intent was

to give them the freedom to love and serve God with heart, soul, mind, and strength. As

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69. Volf provides a similar example in *Exclusion and Embrace* (p. 66).

70. Anderson, *On Being Human*, 35–37; Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 40–42; McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood*, 22.

71. Recall Calvin's important observation that genuine God-knowledge and genuine self-knowledge mutually correspond and arise together. Calvin, *Institutes* I.I.1–3, 37–39; cf. Augustine, *Confessions*, 44. Earlier, Clement of Alexandria had written, "It is then, as appears, the greatest of all lessons to know one's self. For if one knows himself, he will know God; and knowing God, he will be made like God. . . ." (Clement, *The Instructor* III.1. 271). For an insightful and practical approach to spiritual formation grounded in this truth, see David G. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

72. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens, vol. 1, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998). 45–55.

McFadyen puts it, "It is the divine intention that human beings shall be free in relation to Godself as God's dialogue-partners."[73]

2.   God's reconciling love opens the human heart for reconciliation with God and

        others

The fall of human beings into sin, as depicted in Genesis 3, means that human beings have corrupted their relationship with God and have become alienated from God. As the Genesis narrative shows, the fall into sin has a fundamentally relational aspect because it is rooted in mistrust or disbelief and an arrogant desire for autonomy from God (we will consider other aspects of the fall in chapters 4 and 5). Mistrust is apparent when Adam and Eve begin to question God's Word to them: "You may eat any fruit in the garden except fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat of its fruit, you will surely die" (Gen 2:17).[74] Instead, they trust the deceiving word of the serpent and their own capacity to discern what is best without relying on God. Their arrogant desire for autonomy is demonstrated by their yielding to the temptation of eating from the forbidden tree in order to become like God (Gen 3:4). In their created state, Adam and Eve were designed to live as exocentric beings that receive their life-breath and find their own individual identities outside themselves in God. Now, they yield to the temptation to be *as individuals* their own source of life and identity, their own source of the knowledge of good and evil.[75] Bonhoeffer infers that the human being "now lives out of its own

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73.   McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood*, 20.

74.   See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 105–9 and *Temptation*, trans. Kathleen Downham (London SCM, 1955), 16.

75.   Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott, vol. 6, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 277, 299–338. Bonhoeffer argues that faith in Christ reorients us toward trusting God as the source of all goodness. He writes, "We experience and recognize ethical reality not by craftiness, not by knowing all the tricks, but only by standing straightforwardly in the truth of God and by looking to that truth with eyes that it makes simple [einfältig] and wise" (*Ethics*, 78). Christian ethics primarily involves formation in Christ, not in an

resources, creates its own life, is its own creator; it no longer needs the Creator, it has

itself become creator, inasmuch as it creates its own life. Thereby its creatureliness is

eliminated, destroyed. Adam is no longer a creature."[76] Of course, human beings do not

have it within themselves to be their own creator, their own source of life and identity;

hence, God's Word proves to be true: "You will surely die." Adam and Eve immediately

sense that something is wrong, and in their shame they flee and hide from God (Gen 3:7–

8). Moreover, their initial mistrust leads to greater mistrust, denial, and blame, as they

begin to accuse each other and even God of wrongdoing (Gen 3:12–13). In response to

their disobedience God shows them love and mercy (Gen 3:21) but allows them to live

with the consequences of their sin, namely their alienation from God (as depicted by their

banishment from the Garden of Eden in Gen 3:23–24) and from each other (as depicted

in the growing tension and escalating hatred between human beings in Gen 4–11).

Bonhoeffer observes that by usurping God's place as the center and source of life,

freedom, and truth, human beings sinfully place themselves in the center.[77] This has

serious and far-reaching consequences. As Bonhoeffer graphically describes it,

> Because the fall of humankind is both inconceivable and finally inexcusable in
> God's creation, the word *disobedience* fails to describe the situation adequately.
> It is rebellion, the creatures stepping outside of the creature's only possible
> attitude, the creature's becoming creator, the destruction of creatureliness, a
> defection, a falling away from being safely held as a creature. As such a
> defection it is a *continual* fall, a *plunging down* into a bottomless abyss, a state of
> being let go, a process of moving further and further away, falling deeper and
> deeper. And in all this it is not merely a *moral lapse* but the destruction of

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expansion of *our* (i.e., autonomous) knowledge of good and evil, our "knowing good and evil in disunion
with the origin" as Bonhoeffer puts it (*Ethics*, 308). "The question of the good becomes the question of
participating in God's reality revealed in Christ" (*Ethics*, 50). "Thereby we are turned away from any
abstract ethic and toward a concrete ethic. We can and should speak not about what the good is, can be, or
should be for each and every time, but about *how Christ may take form among us today and here*" (*Ethics*,
99; emphasis original).

    76.   Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 115.

    77.   Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 115–22. Bonhoeffer pursues an existential reading of the Fall,
rather than a moralistic one.

creation by the creature. The extent of the fall is such that it affects the whole created world.[78]

In their fallen orientation, human beings now redefine their God-given freedom as freedom-for-self and unwittingly become slaves to sin. Henceforth, their existence is no longer characterized by freedom for God, but rather by enslavement to self as they becomes slaves to their own corrupt nature. Likewise, they no longer exist in freedom for other human beings, but now seek to dominate and rule others. Furthermore, they no longer freely rule creation, but are now ruled by it and exist in hostility toward it. In sum, freedom has been turned on its head and corrupted.

To describe the sinful condition, Bonhoeffer draws upon Luther's observation that humans have a *cor curvum in se*, a heart turned in upon itself. Instead of living in genuine exocentricity they now become radically self-centered or "wrongly centered" as Miroslav Volf puts it.[79] In this fallen, self-enclosed state, human beings experience disorientation, alienation, and distortion in their relations to themselves, others, and the world. Concerning their identity and personal groundedness, human beings experience a disruption of the self's integrity. Consequently, they struggle to know and find themselves and desperately attempt either to construct themselves through accomplishments and achievements (pseudo-immanence through dominance) or distract themselves from the problem by losing themselves in relationships and experiences (pseudo-transcendence through self-abandonment).[80] Søren Kierkegaard referred to this condition as 'despair.' He argued that despair appears in two basic forms, either in "not

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78. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 120. See, in this light, Rom. 1:18–32.
79. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 69. See also Pannenberg's discussion of sin as 'centrality' in *Anthropology*, 80–153.
80. See Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus· Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossword, 1989).

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wanting to be oneself" or in "wanting to be oneself" (i.e., one's ideal self).[81] Ultimately

though, the root of despair is "not wanting to be oneself," as even in the case of wanting

to be one's ideal self, one is desiring *to become in the future* what one currently *is not in*

the present. Hence, even the desire to become one's *true* self is nevertheless a desire not

to be one's *actual* self. For Kierkegaard, this disruption in the synthesis of the self is the

result of human alienation from God and thus can be remedied only through faith in God.

By faith, the self is freed to be itself by living genuinely before God. As such, the human

self can now rest, "grounded transparently in the power that established it."[82]

In their self-enclosed state, human beings also experience alienation from each

other, leading to the destructive patterns of what Miroslav Volf calls 'exclusion.'

According to Volf, exclusion appears in two basic forms, both of which result from a

distortion of our created exocentricity or differentiation (which, as discussed earlier, is a

properly aligned synthesis of being distinct from yet bound to others). First, we can

exclude others by placing ourselves in a position of sovereign independence from them.

In this case, the other "emerges either as an enemy that must be pushed away from the

self and driven out of its space or as a nonentity—a superfluous being—that can be

disregarded and abandoned."[83] This perhaps represents the most obvious way that we

exclude others. We see them as being too different, too foreign, too 'other' from us. As

such, they are a threat to our own security, a rival to our own ambition for dominance and

influence, or a competitor in our own quest for wealth and power. The second, less

obvious way that we exclude others is by failing to take their otherness seriously enough.

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81. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 43–51.
82. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, 44. Or, as Bonhoeffer puts it, they are freed once again to be genuine creatures of their Creator (*Ethics*, 94).
83. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 67.

In this case, we fail to see the other truly as an 'other' that stands over-against us making

an ethical claim on us. We thus assimilate the other into our own views, our own plans,

our own desires and ambitions. In Kant's language, we fail to treat other persons as ends

in themselves and see them merely as means to our own ends. Moreover, by so doing we

fail to allow others the space they need truly to be themselves. As Bonhoeffer says, we

fashion others into our own image rather than seeing them as reflecting God's image in

their own unique way. Bonhoeffer accordingly warns:

> God does not want me to mold others into the image that seems good to me, that
> is, into my own image. Instead, in their freedom from me God made other people
> in God's own image. I can never know in advance how God's image should
> appear in others. That image always takes on a completely new and unique form
> whose origin is found solely in God's free and sovereign act of creation.[84]

By assimilating others into our own image, we fail to acknowledge their difference and

thereby suppress their individuality, thus disregarding their distinctive value and dignity

as human beings.

Finally, the self-enclosed state leads human beings to experience alienation from

the natural world.[85] Scripture alludes to this in its description of God's curse on the land

(Gen 3, unfolding throughout the book), resulting in difficulty in tending and working the

land (as well as famine and droughts) and escalating conflict in terms of ownership

rights, imperialism, and war. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul says that all of

creation is experiencing the impact of the curse of sin and is groaning in anticipation of

final redemption and re-creation (Rom 8:19–22). Human alienation from the creation can

lead to the exclusionary treatment of the natural environment, whereby humans either

inappropriately assert their independence from or dominance over nature (e.g., uncritical

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84. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 95.

85. Grenz, *Theology*, 207. See also Volf's discussion of "Spirit, Work, and Environment" in *Work in the Spirit*, 141–48.

use of technology, uncontrolled growth and expansion into natural habitats, etc.) or treat it merely as a means for human-oriented ends (e.g., a profit-driven disregard for the environment, which in turn threatens all forms of life including human). Alternatively, the distorted relationship between human beings and the natural world can foster an inappropriate sense of human oneness with creation that downplays the uniqueness of human beings as God's rightful stewards, leading them to abnegate their responsibility to care for creation by sustaining, restoring, and improving it.

In response to human sinfulness, rebellion, and alienation, God's reconciling love opens the human heart for restored communion with God, others, and the natural world. In his epistle to the Romans, Paul writes, "Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with "God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us" (Rom 5:1). Elsewhere, Paul writes that in Christ God "reconciled everything to Godself" and "made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of his blood shed on the cross" (Col 1:20). Jesus understood that a crucial aspect of his mission was to reconcile human beings to a restored relationship with God and each other. Accordingly he prayed, "My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father—that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me" (John 14:21). Jesus came to unite us to the Father and thereby to unite us together as fellow human beings. In order to do this, Jesus took our alienated condition upon himself and, by means of the cross, suffered rejection, humiliation, hatred, violence, foresakenness, and death at the hands of and in solidarity

with fellow human beings.[86] Even his closest friends abandoned him. Yet at the very same time that Jesus hung on the cross, he demonstrated Gods' love and forgiveness: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). And in the very midst of his loneliness and rejection, Jesus created community: "When Jesus saw his mother standing there beside the disciple he loved, he said to her, 'Woman, he is your son.' And he said to the disciple, 'She is your mother'" (John 19:26). Moreover, in overcoming the alienating power of sin on the cross, Jesus overcame the destructive power of exclusion by "disarming the principalities and powers" of spiritual and structural–systemic evil (Col 2:15; Eph 6:12) and by demonstrating God's judgment against divisive social barriers, such as racial, socio-economic, and gender inequality: "There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

The liberating presence and redemptive activity of the Holy Spirit are essential in inaugurating and realizing our reconciliation with God and one another in Christ. Specifically, the Holy Spirit brings healing to our self-enclosed hearts (*cor curvum in se*) and opens them to be free for God and others once again. The Spirit reverses our egocentricity and reorients us to be centered *extra se in Christo*, outside of ourselves in Christ. As Volf says, our new center is a de-centered center.[87] Or, as Luther puts it, "A Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbour. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbour through love."[88] The

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86.   For a profound treatment of this theme, see Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology,* trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

87.   Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace,* 71. See also Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self,* 325–26.

88.   Luther, *On Christian Liberty,* 62.

Christian now lives within what Alan Torrance calls the "I, yet not I, but Christ" dynamic

of Christian existence.[89] Torrance is referring to Paul's words in Galatians 2:19–20: "I

have been crucified with Christ nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ who lives in me.

And the life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave

himself for me."[90] Importantly, it is the Holy Spirit who enables one to live this "I, yet

not I, but Christ" dynamic, because it is the Spirit who brings human beings into union

with Christ. Our reconciliation with God and others is therefore a *pneumatological event*

in which the Spirit takes an active and integral role. As Volf maintains, "The Spirit enters

the citadel of the self, de-centers the self by fashioning it in the image of the self-giving

Christ, and frees its will so it can resist the power of exclusion in the power of the Spirit

of embrace."[91] This pneumatological affirmation is consistent with the mutual love model

of the Trinity discussed at the beginning of this chapter, which identified the Holy Spirit

as the bond of love between the Father and the Son and as the one who binds together the

Son's two natures (divine and human) in the Incarnation and Resurrection.[92] This latter

bond forms the basis of Christ's capacity to be the sole priest and mediator for fallen and

alienated human beings before God. It allows Christ to receive and take to himself all of

creation, to reconcile and redeem it by means of the cross and the Resurrection, and

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89.   Alan J. Torrance, *Persons in Communion. An Essay on Trinitarian Description and Human Participation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 363.

90.   Cf. Col 2:9–10: "For in Christ the fullness of God lives in a human body, and you are complete through your union with Christ . . . ."

91.   Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 92.

92.   Steven Studebaker explains the Spirit's identity as the bond of love between the Father and Son as follows: "[T]he Son is a subject who loves the Father. The Father and the Son in their concordant love for one another bring forth the Holy Spirit. The personal identity of the Holy Spirit is the objectification of the Father's and Son's mutual love. As mutual love, the Holy Spirit's primary characteristic is union. The Spirit is the love that indissolubly unites the Father and the Son. The identity of the Holy Spirit as mutual love does not depersonalize the Spirit. The Spirit is a unique divine person whose activity is that of uniting the other two divine persons." Studebaker, "Integrating Pneumatology and Christology," 12. See also Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 327.

finally to offer it back to the Father as the New Creation.[93] Moreover, in the mutual love

model, the Spirit plays a parallel role in human redemption by acting as the bond of love

between God and redeemed human beings, whom the Spirit brings into union with Christ

(the Spirit comes to indwell human beings, thereby placing them "in Christ" who is "in"

the Father).[94] This union with Christ in the Spirit grounds and enables all of Christian life

and ministry—being and doing, knowing and worshiping, loving and serving.

Miroslav Volf employs the analogy of 'embrace' to help clarify the meaning of

reconciliation.[95] He analyzes four 'acts' in the drama of embrace and then suggests four

key features of the embrace as a whole. The first act is the *opening of one's arms*.

Opening one's arms signifies to another a desire for connection, initiates the creation of

space in oneself for the other to enter safely, and is a gesture of invitation. The second act

is *waiting*. The significance of waiting is that it underscores the importance of both

initiative and reciprocity. Waiting entails that one has taken the first step, but also that

one does not force oneself on the other. It requires patience and the willingness to put

oneself on the line and risk rejection. As such, it is not an "act of invasion" but preserves

the freedom and dignity of the other. The third act is the *closing of the arms*. In this stage

reconciliatory love is accepted and reciprocated by the other. In closing one's arms, one

does not strangle the other but embraces the other gently. This signifies that in the

embrace of reconciliation neither party should be assimilated by the other. They are

embraced and accepted precisely in their alterity as *other*. Act four is the *reopening of the*

arms. This act signifies that the embrace has preserved the unity-in-diversity character of

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93. The theme of creation, fall, and redemption, corresponding to incarnation, cross, and resurrection, is a constant theme in Bonhoeffer's theology. For a summary, see Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 157–59 and *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 381–82.

94. See John 14:16–20; 17:21.

95. For his analysis, see *Exclusion and Embrace*, 140–47.

genuine Christian reconciliation. It ensures that boundaries are respected and prevents an unhealthy co-dependency or enmeshment. Truly loving another means embracing but not owning them. It means ultimately being able to relinquish them into the hands of God, who is their relational center and the ground of their identity and personhood. Volf goes on to say that the embrace as a whole is characterized by the fluidity of identities (persons are mutually impacted yet appropriately differentiated), non-symmetricity (in reconciliation both parties are not necessarily equally guilty; however, following in the way of the Crucified Christ still means embracing the guilty other), under-determination of the outcome (one waits patiently without any guarantee that the embrace will take place), and finally by risk (in initiating reconciliation, one could be misunderstood, despised, or even violated).

In Jesus's parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–31), a young man decides to go out into the world to make his own way. He demands his inheritance from his father, who in sadness obliges him, and leaves his family to live a life of luxury in a foreign land. The selfish act hurts the father and creates enmity between the son and his older brother. Moreover, in his self-satisfying rashness, the wayward son squanders his father's gifts and resources, has to work and survive as a lowly farmhand, and ends up losing his sense of identity.[96] Feeling no longer worthy to be his father's son, he hopes he can return as a hired servant. He finally decides to go back home to plead with his father to receive him as a hired-hand. Surprisingly, he is greeted by an exuberantly loving and compassionate father, who runs to kiss and embrace him and then calls for a great feast to celebrate his son's return. He cries out, "We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of

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96. See Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 160.

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mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now is found." This parable

beautifully illustrates God's reconciling and embracing love in the face of human

selfishness and rebellion.

3.   God's transforming love draws human beings into ever fuller, holistic, and

abundant communion with God and others

As the previous section demonstrated, growing together into maturity in Christ is

not simply about self- or group-improvement, but involves transformation by the Spirit.

More profoundly, it involves participating in the divine life as we share by the Spirit in

the Son's relationship with the Father.[97] Thus, growing in Christ consists not only in

imitating him but also involves the spiritual reality of Christ being formed in us by the

Spirit.[98] "For it is God who works within you, both to will and to do according to God's

own good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). We now press on toward the goal of knowing and being

like Christ, sharing in his suffering and experiencing the power of his resurrection, yet we

are able to do so only because Christ has already taken hold of us and is drawing us

toward that goal (Phil 3:12–14). Sharing in the divine life is a consequence not merely of

our individual faith (though it includes it) but points to the fact that through the

Incarnation, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ, God has done something

radically and comprehensively new. As Paul says, "If anyone is in Christ there is a new

creation" (2 Cor 5:17). In Christ God reconciled all things to Godself (Col 1:20) and is

now in the process of making all things new (Rev 21:5). The promise of Scripture is that

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97.   For the practical implications of our participation in the divine life, see James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community & the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996). Bonhoeffer stressed participation in the reality of God as the essence of Christian existence. See Sabine Dramm. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer An Introduction to His Thought*, trans. Thomas Rice (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 39, 42, 46.

98.   Both of these are major themes in Bonhoeffer's work. The imitation of Christ is central in *Discipleship* while the notion of Christ being formed in us is central in *Ethics*.

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God is going to complete the good work that has already begun (Phil 1:6). This includes

the reconciliation, restoration, and fulfillment of human relationships with God and with

other human beings. In anticipation of the final return of Christ, God's transforming love

is drawing human beings into ever fuller, holistic, and abundant communion with God

and others. "God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And

as we live in God, our love grows more perfect" (1 John 4:16–17). God is creating a new

humanity in Christ by the Spirit. To foreshadow what I will later say in the ecclesiology

section, Christians receive a down-payment of God's transformative love and a foretaste

of sharing in the loving, ecstatic communion of the Trinity through their life together in

the community of faith. As Grenz eloquently puts it,

> [T]he Spirit brings the ecclesial community to fulfill the divinely given mandate
> to be the prolepsis of the new humanity as the *imago dei*, which is the goal of the
> biblical salvation-historical drama. . . . Thereby, it truly becomes a fellowship of
> those whose relationships are being transformed by the power of the indwelling
> Spirit to reflect as far as possible in the midst of the brokenness of the present the
> eschatological community modeled after the fullness of love present within the
> dynamic of the triune God.[99]

What will the fully realized community of God look like? Scripture gives us only

gleanings, hints, and snapshots. We do know that we will be reunited in fellowship with

fellow human beings whom Christ has redeemed (1 Thess 4:13–18; 2 Thess 2:1). We also

know that God intends this new community to include as many people as possible and

accordingly is patiently waiting for all to come to faith, not wanting any to perish (2 Pet

3:9). From the picture of the heavenly city painted in Revelation 21–22, we know that we

will see God's face, experience the joy of God's full presence and love, and finally rest in

the deep knowledge that we belong to God. We will know God and others as they truly

are, and in turn we will be deeply known, understood, and accepted. Hence, our

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99. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 335.

relationships with God and others will be characterized by unreserved trust and transparency. There will no longer be any tears, sorrow, pain, or death; no more sin, no lying, cheating, abuse, hatred, or violence. Instead, we will live in peace, security, prosperity, and everlasting joy with God and others in the new creation.

4. General implications for Christian ethics

I now conclude this chapter by suggesting, very briefly, some implications that a relational understanding of human personhood has for Christian ethics. First, a relational view of personhood underscores the centrality of love for Christian ethics. To repeat Luther's statement, "A Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbour. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbour through love."[100] This reflects Jesus's pronouncement that the greatest two commandments are to love God with all of one's heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love one's neighbour as oneself (Mark 12:29–31). Of course, knowing precisely *how* to love another person in various concrete situations requires wisdom, discernment, and theological-ethical reflection in the context of a loving community of faith.[101] But for now, suffice it to say that loving God and others is the top priority. A second, related implication is that we should be focused primarily on forming *people* according to the image of Christ in their situated lives and concrete contexts, not just on formulating rules, principles, axioms, or formulas to solve abstract moral quandaries.[102] Jesus himself emphasized the importance of having a transformed heart, the cultivation of which leads one to love God and others

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100. Luther, *On Christian Liberty*, 62.

101. To pursue this in more detail, see: Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation. A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996); and Glen Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

102. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 99.

reflexively. He argued that good works flow from a good heart, just as good fruit flows

from a good tree (Luke 6:43–45). While rules, principles, and abstract reasoning do play

a role in a comprehensive relational Christian ethics, they must be placed within the

larger framework of worldview and character formation.[103] I will have more to say about

character formation in the next chapter. Third, the intrinsically relational nature of a

theological understanding of human personhood, in its creation, distortion, redemption,

and eschatological transformation, means that we should be equally concerned with

personal *and* social ethics. The individual person is inherently social, while society is

composed of individual or differentiated persons. Accordingly, Christian ethics is

irreducibly personal-social in character. This means that Christians ought to be concerned

both for personal morality *and* for interpersonal harmony, in both the church and society,

by fostering healing, forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace. They ought to strive

tirelessly both for individual holiness *and* for communal, social, and structural-systemic

justice. Finally, a Christian love-ethic means loving and advocating for those who are

'other' or different from oneself, including the poor, the hungry, the weak, the abused,

those who suffer from mental and physical disabilities, the lonely, the sick, the

downtrodden, the socially marginalized or outcastes, the prisoners, and even the enemy.

Moreover, caring for the 'other' means caring for people dispersed throughout the world.

In his parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus radically expanded the concept of one's

neighbour to include those who are very different from oneself, whether by race or

ethnicity (Jew vs. Samaritan), religion (pure Jew vs. 'godless' Samaritan), social status

(sacred priest vs. lay traveler) or place of origin (Judea vs. Samaria; see also John 4:21–

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103. Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 100–7. See also Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002).

24). In a globalized context, faithfulness to the principles that Jesus emphasized requires expanding the concept of neighbour even further. Christian ethics, therefore, will include global ethics, which highlights not only the relational character of personhood and ethics but also the universality of the church as Christ's Body extending throughout the world and God's universal intent to reconcile all things in Christ (Col 1:20).[104] In addition, in recognition of our relationship to the earth as faithful stewards, Christian ethics will include care for nature and for the environment.

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104. The theological foundation for a global ethic is the assumption and reconciliation of all of humanity in Christ (Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 85, 94; Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, 161, 250).

Chapter 4:
The Human Person as a Rational Creature

A.   Introduction

The last chapter discussed the relational character of human personhood and

reflected on the centrality of love for Christian theology and ethics. In this chapter, I

argue that the human person is a rational creature and reflect on the importance of

wisdom for Christian theology and ethics (I discuss wisdom as combining rationality with

ethical responsibility before God). In the previous chapter I explained that God invites

human beings to participate in the divine *communion* of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by

drawing them to share in the ecstatic love of God. What I want to say in this chapter

reflects a similar pattern: God invites human beings to participate in the divine

conversation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by drawing them to share in the wisdom and

Logos of God. By participating with God in this way, human beings are invited to discern

the creational designs and purposes of the Father, through the wisdom of the Son, in the

illumination and empowerment of the Spirit. Theologically and ethically, this perspective

emphasizes the aspect of human purpose and destiny that concerns *knowing* God and

other human beings and *understanding* God's created world.

Creation as intelligible trinitarian conversation

> "In the beginning . . . God *said* . . ." (Gen 1:1, 3; emphasis added).

> "In the beginning was the Word . . . All things were made through him, and
> without him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:1, 3).

> "God created all things through Christ and for Christ. He is before all things, and
> in him all things hold together." (Col 1:16–17)

> "The Spirit searches all things, even the deeps things of God. . . . No one knows
> the things of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Cor 2:10, 11).

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Scripture depicts the creation of the world as a kind of divine conversation, in which the trinitarian God calls creation into existence and then creation responds obediently to God's call.[1] In this conversation, God the Father (*Thought*) speaks creation into being by means of God the Son (the Father's intelligible *Word*) in the dynamic and animating life-power of God the Holy Spirit (*Breath*, Lord and Giver of Life). All of creation responds to God's speech and displays God's glory and purposive creativity, but human beings respond in a unique way. Human beings are special in that God's Word comes to them in the form of a personal and personalizing intelligible address, which calls forth a reciprocal intelligible response. God not only creates human beings by means of the divine *Logos*; God also invites human beings to share in the divine *Logos* in and through the illuminating power and animating *Breath* of the Spirit. In chapter three we observed that God's Word constitutes human beings as relational creatures who respond to God's love in receptivity and reciprocity. We now see that God's Word simultaneously constitutes human beings as rational creatures, with the intelligence and freedom not merely to parrot God's speech but actually to converse with God as genuine conversation partners. God created humans in and for love, to be in relationship with God, Father, Son, and Spirit. Yet growing in love includes growing in one's knowledge of the other. Accordingly, God's ecstatic love confronts human beings as God's intelligible and self-revelatory Word and illuminating Spirit, which invites an intelligible and responsible answer. In reciprocal love to God and in basic trust in God, human beings are created to

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1. The notion of creation as divine conversation occurs in Luther. See, for example, *Luther's Works* 1.9, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958). See also Jens Zimmermann's discussion of Luther in his *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics: An Incarnational-Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 51–57; cf. Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 95–105.

live their lives as an ongoing conversation with God. The characteristic that describes this way of life is what Scripture calls wisdom.

B.   'Rational' and 'ethical' as mutually defining

1.   *Imago Dei*, morality, and rationality

In chapter three we observed that the image of God refers to three things, namely a relationship, a capacity or structure, and a vocation or calling, though it was suggested that the relational aspect stands out as primary. We also observed that the relational interpretation of the image of God has its immediate historical roots in Luther and Calvin, who interpreted it in moral and spiritual terms as being in a right relationship with God by reflecting God's glory and character. In order to do that, however, human beings must be endowed with freedom and reason, because reflecting God's character implies not just mimicking God's actions or following God's rules but being the kind of people who reflect God's goodness in their whole being—in their thoughts, affections, intentions, and actions. It means being the kind of people whose lives demonstrate a holistic love for God and fellow human beings. This includes loving God and others with their minds. In light of this, theologians such as Augustine were correct to argue that one aspect of the *imago Dei* is the operation of human reasoning, which implies that human beings are like God in that they are rational creatures.[2]

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2.   See Grenz's discussion of Augustine in Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 152–57. Augustine followed the reverse pattern and suggested that we cannot love what we do not know, though he acknowledged a circularity (he called it a vicious circle) in the relationship between knowing and loving. See Augustine, *The Trinity* VIII/3.6, trans. Edmund Hill, part I, vol. 5, *The Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle (New York: New City Press, 1991), 245–46. Thus, Grenz comments, "For Augustine, then, the seat of the divine image in the human person is the soul in its intellectual dimension, insofar as the goal of the image is knowledge of God. Yet in Augustine's estimation, knowledge of God is to be accompanied by love for God" (Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 155). While the relationship between knowing and loving is something of a chicken-and-egg problem, I maintain that loving takes priority, because knowing and being known presuppose the

Augustine was not the first to suggest that the divine image consists in human rationality. Many earlier theologians had already done so (some more explicitly than others), including Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius, and Cyril of Jerusalem, but Augustine's view became the most influential.[3] In his work, *The Trinity*, Augustine searches for images of the triune God in creation and finally arrives at the human mind. He proposes that the human mind images God in the act of memory, understanding, and will.[4] Augustine places the emphasis on the activity of the mind (i.e., he means the mind active in the reasoning process, not simply the capacity for rationality or thought), because this demonstrates the unity of the Trinity by showing the simultaneous interaction of three inseparable and mutually implying operations.[5] "These three then, memory, understanding, and will, are not three lives but one life, not three minds but one mind."[6] In Augustine's psychological analogy of memory, understanding, and will, there is no clear way to establish which function is prior and which is subordinate.[7] The action of one implies the joint action of all three. Augustine counsels supreme caution when thinking about trinitarian analogies and, accordingly, refuses to identify any of the trinitarian persons with memory, understanding, or will.[8] His overall point is that the reasoning process within a human being images the tri-unity of God by

loving will to self-revelation or self-disclosure. In other words, it is true that we cannot love God without knowing God but it is also true that we could not begin to know God without God's self-disclosure to us in revelation, which is in turn prompted by God's ecstatic nature as a Being who loves and who is Love.

3. See Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 143–52.

4. Augustine, *The Trinity* X/4.17–18 (pp. 298–99).

5. Augustine, *The Trinity* XIV/2.9–10 (pp. 377–78).

6. Augustine, *The Trinity* X/4.18 (p. 298).

7. See Augustine, "Sermon 52," in *Sermons III· On the New Testament*, trans. Edmund Hill, part III, vol. 3, *The Works of Saint Augustine· A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle (New York: New City Press, 1991), 59–62.

8. Augustine, "Sermon 52," 62. However, he does assign places to the trinitarian persons in his mutual love model because he believes that Scripture warrants it by revealing that "God is love" (1 John 4:16).

demonstrating the joint operation of three relations in one Being. Over time, Augustine's

reasoning led to the view that the image of God is located in the individual human's use

of reason, though Augustine himself argued that the human rational nature images God

most clearly when it remembers, knows, and loves God. In Augustine's view, genuine

rationality is oriented to God and responsive to God's purposes and will. For Augustine,

then, rationality, awareness of God, and ethical responsibility before God are deeply

intertwined.

Many centuries later, the philosopher Immanuel Kant articulated a view of the

human person that combined both reasoning and morality, but without Augustine's

emphasis on grounding and orienting rationality in and to God (i.e., the divine

Logos/Word). Kant suggested that the human mind is inherently structured by certain

formal concepts present within it (such as space and time), which correspond to universal

categories of reason. These structures enable human beings to make rationally coherent

and consistent judgements about the world and their place in it. Moreover, on account of

their inherent capacity for rationality, human beings have direct access by means of *a*

priori reasoning to the universal moral law without requiring the mediation of experience

(according to Kant, the senses "merely furnish the 'raw data' that the mind

systematizes").[9] For Kant, there is a correspondence between the human mind and the

fundamental structuring of reality, both of which are constituted by and oriented to

universal reason and the moral law. In a very real sense for Kant, then, morality is built

into the very fabric of the universe. Consequently, Kant linked rationality and morality

together in his view that "the goal of the moral dimension of human life is to become as

9.   Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 74.

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rational as possible."[10] However, by removing the classical (Augustinian) Christian

emphasis on the personal orientation of human rationality to God (including the

dialectical relation of self-knowledge to God-knowledge), Kant created a fissure

separating faith from reason and ethics. For Kant, 'God' is the abstract postulate of

ethics, not the concrete foundation and source for ethics.

From a theological perspective, Kant's view must finally be rejected because it

individualizes and depersonalizes the nature of human moral existence. It does this by

failing to account for human beings as relational persons before God, who encounter in

God and other human beings concrete moral claims on their own existence.[11] Yet Kant's

approach does yield a legitimate insight, namely that there is a moral law (God's law) and

hence morality pervades the structure of reality. Three interrelated theological

observations lend support to Kant's insight. First, God created the world as an integrated

whole and declared it "good." Goodness is a natural quality of creation because God

created the world to be good and because God's glory and goodness continually fill and

pervade it (e.g., Ps 19:1–4; Isa 6:3). Second, at the climax of creation God created human

beings and then declared the whole of creation to be "very good." There is a strong sense

in the creation account that God created the world *for* human beings, meaning not that

everything else has only instrumental value but that human beings have a special and

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10.   Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 75.

11.   Kierkegaard says, "This notion of the single human being before God never occurs to speculative thought; it only universalizes particular humans phantastically into the human race. It was exactly for this reason that a disbelieving Christianity came up with the ideas that sin is sin, that it is neither here nor there whether it is before God. In other words, it wanted to get rid of the specification 'before God,' and to that end invented a new wisdom, which nevertheless, curiously enough, was neither more nor less than what the higher wisdom generally is – the old paganism." Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death. A Christian Psychological Exposition for Edification and Awakening*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 115.

unique place in it.[12] God created the world and human beings in such a way that what is truly good for human beings is good for the natural world and vice-versa. Conversely, in the fallen or sinful state of alienation from and rebellion against God (depicted by Geneses 3 onward) there is a moral disruption in the natural order of things. Not only does sin negatively impact the moral existence of human beings before God and others, it also creates moral ambiguity and distortion in the relation of human beings to the natural world. As Genesis three records, the curse affects the spiritual world (the devil/demonic), human beings, and the natural world (the ground or land is also cursed). It does not totally remove God's presence and sustaining care from the world, without which the universe would spin out into chaos and destruction, but it does introduce a rupture characterized by moral ambiguity and distortion.[13] Third, it is still possible for human beings to discern right and wrong, even if such discernment is only partial and ambiguous. Human beings still have limited access to God's moral law, which is written on their hearts (Rom 2:15), even as they fail to live by it consistently due to the corruption of their passions, mind, and will (Rom 1, 7). In sum, human beings are by God's design moral and rational beings, though because of sin both their morality and rationality are distorted and corrupted.

2.   Human corruption, the breakdown of the conversation, and the limits of human
       access to the moral law

       We gain a better sense of the limits of human understanding of the moral law by exploring the epistemological implications of human corruption. Human corruption is the

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12.   By way of analogy, what a person makes or creates often has intrinsic value to them but such value pales in comparison to the value of their children.

13.   As Bonhoeffer says, "All things appear as in a distorted mirror if they are not seen and recognized in God." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott, vol. 6, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 48.

result of humanity's alienation from God and rebellion against God. Alienation from God includes estrangement from the divine Word, which means that human beings no longer share in the divine conversation in a pure and unambiguous way. In this breakdown of communication, human beings begin to value their own words over God's Word. In their rebellion from God, they attempt to raise their own reasoning to a place of supremacy and sovereignty over the mind of God.[14] Their once harmoniously intelligible conversation with God becomes an ugly cacophony of prideful and irrational voices trying to dominate and capitalize on the exchange. This results in the corruption of their knowledge of God, of other human beings, and of the world. When they are alienated from the divine Word and left to their own words, human beings cannot engage in true theology; they can only engage in mythology because their thoughts and language are inadequate, distorted, and prone to idolatry. "Instead of seeing God, human beings see themselves."[15] As Bonhoeffer argued in his Christology lectures, when humans elevate their own *logoi* (words) above God's *Logos* (Word), they even attempt to classify Christ according to human categories of understanding. Due to their fallenness and corruption, they cannot genuinely think outside of themselves and instead assimilate Christ into their own desires and agendas. They mistakenly associate him with their own values and ideals, thereby claiming divine approval for our own *logoi*. Likewise, instead of seeing other people as genuine others they assimilate them into their own self-oriented thoughts, desires, and plans. On a larger social scale, this assimilative tendency leads to the creation of oppressive ideologies, systems, and regimes.[16] In light of this, Bonhoeffer argued that

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14. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 299–304.

15. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 303.

16. Bonhoeffer delivered his Christology lectures in 1933. Accordingly, Hitler's recent ascension to power looms in the background and occupies much of Bonhoeffer's thinking and writing.

Jesus Christ came as the supreme Counter-*Logos* and declared all human *logoi* to be judged, dead, and in need of transformation.[17]

To elucidate the epistemological predicament created by human sin, Bonhoeffer expands Luther's concept of the *cor curvum in se* (discussed last chapter) and develops its implications for human thinking. He argues that the distortion of human relationships has an epistemological counterpart (recall that the distortion is characterized by a change in orientation from *being-for-God-and-others* to *being-for-self*). Just as sin creates within the human being a heart turned in upon itself, so it also creates a mind turned in upon itself.[18] Bonhoeffer writes, "It is clear now that, on its own, the I cannot move beyond itself. It is imprisoned in itself, it sees only itself, even when it sees another, even when it wants to see God."[19] The will to know has become a veiled will to power.[20] This is the epistemological implication of being "in Adam," by which Bonhoeffer means the state of being in sin. He explains,

> For 'in Adam' means to be in untruth, in culpable perversion of the will, that is, of human essence. It means to be turned inward into one's self, *cor curvum in se*. Human beings have torn themselves loose from community with God and, therefore, also from that with other human beings, and now they stand alone, that

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17. For Bonhoeffer's analysis of Christ as the Counter-*Logos*, see: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," in *Berlin: 1921–33*, vol. 12 *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Larry L. Rasmussen, trans. Isabel Best and David Higgins (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 300–10. For the relevance of Bonhoeffer's analysis to the problems of injustice and oppression, see my article "Bonhoeffer's Anti-Logos and its Challenge to Oppression," *Crux* 41, no. 2 (2005): 2–9.

18. This enthronement of the self-enclosed 'I' leads to the oppressive and dominating forms of the subject-object relation (and other corresponding binary oppositions) that rightfully concern postmodern writers. See Miroslav Volf's well-balanced comments in *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Explanation of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 60–64, 204–5.

19. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology*, ed. Wayne Whitson Floyd, trans. H. Martin Rumscheidt, vol. 2 *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 45.

20. Nietzsche's description of the mind's will to power is an apt description of the depraved will of the *sinful mind* (though it does not aptly describe *willing and knowing as such*, as Nietzsche believed). For example, "It always creates the world in its own image; it cannot do otherwise; philosophy is this tyrannical impulse itself, the most spiritual Will to Power, the will to 'creation of the world,' the will to the *causa prima*." Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (Mineolo: Dover, 1997), 6.

is, in untruth. Because human beings are alone, the world is 'their' world, and other human beings have sunk into the world of things (cf. Heidegger's '*Mitsein*', 'being-with'). God has become a religious object, and human beings themselves have become their own creator and lord, belonging to themselves.[21]

When human beings are alienated from God their participation in the divine *Logos* is impaired and their reasoning is distorted. As the New Testament puts it, they suffer from spiritual blindness and defilement of the mind (2 Cor 4:4; Tit 1:15) and become enemies of God in their minds (Col 1:21). Consequently, their natural ability to access and understand the moral law is impaired (Rom 1). To be clear, it is not that human beings lose their *capacity* for reasoning; they continue to be adept at logic, empirical observation, and connecting means to ends. Rather, by alienating themselves from the ground of all rationality (the divine *Logos*) the *orientation* of their reasoning loses its proper centre. Their systems of thought may pass the test of internal validity, but their overall worldview is deficient. Correcting the problem involves not the abandonment of human reason but its reorientation, so that it can understand all things *sub ratione Dei* (in light of the relation of all things to God) as Pannenberg puts it.[22]

3.   Redemption from captivity of the mind

Since the human mind becomes corrupted in the fallen condition, it is therefore in need of redemption. The Greek word that the New Testament uses for conversion (*metanoia*) implies a fundamental reorientation of one's thinking or one's mind. In addition to receiving a new status (justification) and a new way of living (growing in sanctification), a follower of Christ also begins to operate with a new worldview founded

21.   Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being*, 137.

22.   F. LeRon Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology. Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 17, 20, 83, 109–10, 169. Similarly, Kevin Vanhoozer argues that theological wisdom helps us to discern the ultimate meaning of things by seeing them in relation to God and God's kingdom. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 377.

on Christ and his teachings. That God wishes to redeem our minds is apparent in Jesus's command that we are to love God with our minds (Mark 12:29–31), in the many New Testament passages that discuss the nature of Christian wisdom (e.g., 1 Cor 2, James 3), and in Paul's exhortation that believers be transformed by the renewing of their minds (Rom 12:1–2). In addition, two significant New Testament events have broad theological implications for the renewing of the mind, namely the Incarnation and Pentecost.

Incarnation and the realignment of rationality

In the Incarnation, the second person of the Trinity (Jesus) fully assumed human existence in order to redeem human beings as whole creatures, mind and body, spiritually and materially.[23] Redemption includes God's act of restoring human beings to renewed participation in the intelligible conversation of the Trinity by sharing again in the divine *Logos*. Accordingly, the New Testament declares that "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16) and thus have access to "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 2:6–12). God could have created us to be ethereal spiritual beings, in which case redemption would mean being set free from the body. Or God could simply have destroyed the world and transported us directly to a non-material heaven. Instead, however, God's becoming one of us in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ signifies God's desire to reaffirm human bodily existence even while transforming it. Human bodily existence includes the life of the mind.

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23. According to T. F. Torrance, Christ's full assumption of humanity, his fully becoming human in every sense, was a pervasive theme amongst patristic theologians such as Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Cyril of Alexandria. In particular, it was crucial to their soteriology because it grounded their view that "the unassumed is the unredeemed" (i.e., Christ cannot save what he does not incorporate through the Incarnation). Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (New York: T & T Clark, 1996), 250. See also Scot McKnight, who refers to this soteriology as "identification for incorporation," in his book *A Community Called Atonement* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007). For a beautiful and graphic portrayal of the themes of assumption and incorporation, see the parable of the lord and servant in Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, trans. Edmund Colledge and James Walsh (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), chapter 51, 267–78.

Many writers have noted that the Incarnation represents a profound affirmation of the original goodness of the world. For example, Eric G. Flett asserts, "The assumption and redemption of the body by Christ, and the entirety of the created order with it, is the fullest affirmation of human corporeality that may be sought."[24] While the Incarnation is not simply a blanket endorsement of every aspect of material existence or of worldly values (Jesus's incarnate life also included the judgment of the Cross), it does demonstrate God's love for the world and God's intention to re-create and redirect it.[25] According to Bonhoeffer, the Incarnation grants renewed dignity and value to the world as it is restored to be what God originally intended. Bonhoeffer often commends what he calls the 'worldliness' of Christianity, but in so doing he is not promoting an irresponsible, careless, or hedonistic attitude or lifestyle.[26] He is careful to distinguish between genuine and false forms of worldliness.[27] For Bonhoeffer, worldliness can be genuine only when it is grounded in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. For Bonhoeffer,

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24. Eric G. Flett, "Priests of Creation, Mediators of Order: the Human Person as a Cultural Being in Thomas F. Torrance's Theological Anthropology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58, no. 2 (2005): 165.

25. John Howard Yoder balances incarnation and the cross and distinguishes between metaphysical and confessional dualism in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Waterloo, ON: Herald, 1998), 62, 108–9. He writes, "The duality of church and world is not a slice separating the religious from the profane, nor the ecclesiastical from the civil, nor the spiritual from the material. It is the divide on this side of which there are those who confess Jesus as Lord, who in so doing are both secular and profane, both spiritual and physical, both ecclesiastical and civil, both individual and organized, in their relationships to one another and to others." (pp. 108–9)

26. For Bonhoeffer's incarnational commendation of worldliness, see *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 280–82, 286, 300, 310–12, 325–29, 336–37, 341–47, 359–63, 369–70, 378–79. For his critical theological affirmation of 'natural life,' see *Ethics*, 171–81. Bonhoeffer goes on to discuss implications for several ethical issues, including natural law, the right to life, suicide, reproduction, and freedom of bodily life (pp. 181–217).

27. In addition, as Clifford J. Green explains, Bonhoeffer's notion of 'worldly' does not convey the same meaning as the English word 'secular' (the first English editions of Bonhoeffer's prison letters made this unfortunate translation error). Bonhoeffer uses the German words 'weltlich' (worldly) and 'Diesseitigkeit' (this-worldliness, as opposed to otherworldliness) to describe his world-embracing, incarnational vision of non-religious Christianity. Bonhoeffer uses the word 'secular' (säkular) only once— and on that occasion he uses it pejoratively to criticize existentialists and psychotherapists as "the secularized offshoots of Christian theology." See Green, "Sociality, Discipleship, and Worldly Theology in Bonhoeffer's Christian Humanism," in *Being Human, Becoming Human: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Social Thought*, ed. Jens Zimmermann and Brian Gregor (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 86–90.

genuine worldliness and genuine faith coexist inseparably in and through Christ, who is

the Centre and Mediator of all reality. As Bonhoeffer reflects in *Ethics*, "In Christ the

reality of God meets the reality of the world and allows us to share in this real encounter .

. . Christian life is participation in the encounter of Christ with the world."[28] Especially

when paired with the bodily resurrection of Christ and the theme of new creation by the

Spirit, the Incarnation affirms the intrinsic value that God places on our bodily and

material existence, including the world of nature, work, rest, leisure, beauty, and human

expression through art and culture.[29] This also includes the life of the mind.[30] In their

book, *The Passionate Intellect*, Norman Klassen and Jens Zimmermann argue that the

Incarnation infuses scholarship and education with a renewed sense of purpose, which is

to proclaim and celebrate the affirmation of the human being and of nature that is offered

in the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. They write, "The quality, character,

and direction of your scholarly pursuits are a witness to God and participate in God's new

creation. By pursuing knowledge, you engage in the diligent study of nature and human

nature for the sake of the kingdom and its restorative, redemptive work."[31] Klassen and

Zimmermann further argue that an incarnational perspective encourages Christians

28.   Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 132.

29.   See Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1991), 88–92, 96. Volf highlights the importance of the Spirit in genuine worldliness: "Because the whole creation is the Spirit's sphere of operation, the Spirit is not only the Spirit of religious experience but also the Spirit of worldly engagement" (p. 104).

30.   For a survey of Christian scholars and teachers attempting to integrate their Christian worldview with their scholarship in a way that preserves the integrity of both, see my article "Teaching, Scholarship, and Christian Worldview: A Review of Recent Literature," *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 11 (2009–2010): 28–61.

31.   Norman Klassen and Jens Zimmermann, *The Passionate Intellect. Incarnational Humanism and the Future of University Education* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 162. See also Jens Zimmermann, "The Passionate Intellect: Christian Humanism and University Education," *Direction* 37 (Spring 2008): 19–37. In addition, see: Deane E. D. Downey and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Christian Worldview and the Academic Disciplines: Crossing the Academy* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2009); Richard T. Hughes, *The Vocation of a Christian Scholar How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); and Harry Lee Poe, *Christianity in the Academy Teaching at the Intersection of Faith and Learning* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

humbly and graciously to affirm truth wherever it is found, including in the discoveries

and achievements of their non-Christian colleagues and students throughout the spectrum

of academic disciplines. Such knowledge is part of God's common grace and can serve

the renewal of the mind. Richard Hughes expresses a similar perspective when he writes:

> Precisely because I am a Christian scholar, I seek to maintain an open classroom
> in which my students can raise any questions they wish. Precisely because I am a
> Christian scholar, I seek to nurture in my students a hunger and thirst for truth.
> Precisely because I am a Christian scholar, I encourage my students to critically
> assess not only the perspectives of others, but their own perspectives as well.
> And precisely because I am a Christian scholar, I encourage my students to
> approach their studies with imagination and creativity.[32]

As Hughes emphasizes, a Christian perspective that is grounded in the Incarnation not

only allows but actively encourages us to question, critically engage, collaborate with

others, and articulate and reformulate our ideas as we passionately seek after the truth.

Pentecost and the Spirit's renewal of our minds

The biblical narrative does not conclude with the Resurrection of Christ. His

redemptive mission was not complete without his ascension to heaven, which gave way

to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Jesus himself once told his disciples that his

imminent departure would be for their benefit, because otherwise the Holy Spirit would

not come (John 16:7). According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit is the divine Counsellor who

leads followers of Jesus into all truth, teaches them all things, and reminds them of

everything that Jesus taught (John 14:16–17, 26). On account of the Spirit's coming at

Pentecost and continual indwelling, disciples have "the mind of Christ" and hence gain

access to the wisdom of God. As Paul writes, "the wisdom we speak of is the secret

wisdom from God . . . we know these things because God has revealed them to us by his

Spirit, and his Spirit searches out everything and shows us even God's deep secrets" (1

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32.   Hughes, *Vocation of a Christian Scholar*, 7.

Cor 2:7, 10). Moreover, "no one can know God's thoughts except God's own Spirit . . .

and God has actually given his Spirit" (1 Cor 2:11, 12).

There are at least six ways in which the Spirit enables our access to the mind of

Christ and thus the wisdom of God. First, the Spirit plays a crucial role in regeneration

and conversion. Believers are reborn of the Spirit (John 3:5–8), washed and given new

life though the Spirit (Titus 3:5), confess that Christ is Lord by the Spirit's illumination (1

Cor 12:3), and receive assurance that they are God's children from the Spirit (Rom 8:16).

Second, the Spirit is involved in the redemption of the human will.[33] In Romans 7, Paul

laments that he cannot observe God's law by his own strength and willpower; he does

what he knows he should not do (sins of commission) and fails to do what he should (sins

of omission). He cries, "Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this

life that is dominated by sin?" (7:24) Yet immediately Paul exclaims with gratitude that

God has delivered him through Christ by the Spirit. He devotes his next chapter to

explaining the working of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life, "for the power of the life-

giving Spirit has freed you through Christ Jesus from the power of sin that leads to death"

(8:2). Third, the Spirit renews our thoughts and attitudes. Paul writes in Romans 8:5 that

"those who are controlled by the Spirit *think about* things that please the Spirit"

(emphasis added). Elsewhere he encourages believers to be united in the Spirit (Eph 4:3–

4) and to maintain fellowship in the Spirit by emulating Christ's humility (Phil 2:1, 5–

11). Fourth, the Spirit sanctifies believers and matures them in love and holiness. In the

New Testament, there is a link between growing in knowledge and wisdom and maturing

in love and holiness (the Spirit's work of sanctification). For example, Jesus told his

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33. In place of the fallen, Nietzschean "will to power" or the Pauline will to sin, the Holy Spirit renews a will to love and serve God and others.

disciples that if they demonstrated their love for him by obeying his commands, he would ask the Father to send them the Holy Spirit (John 14:15–16). James says that genuine wisdom from above is pure, peace-loving, gentle, humble, impartial, sincere, and full of mercy and good deeds (Jas 3:17). And Peter argues that a life of moral excellence leads to deeper knowledge of God, which in turn leads to self-control, patient endurance, godliness, and finally to genuine love for everyone (2 Pet 1:5–7). (Notice that many of the qualities that James and Peter list correspond to the fruit of the Spirit recorded in Galatians 5:22–23.) Fifth, the Spirit gives special gifts of knowledge, wisdom, discernment, visions, and prophetic insight and utterance whenever and to whomever the Spirit wills (e.g., Acts 9:10; 1 Cor 2:10–12; Eph 4:11–13; 2 Pet 1:20–21).[34] Furthermore, the Spirit empowers boldness in preaching and evangelism (Acts 4:8, 13, 29–31; 13:9; 1 Pet 1:11–12) and enables effectiveness in teaching (Acts 5:32; 6:10; 18:25), all of which disseminates and cultivates Christian wisdom. Sixth and finally, the Spirit guides and directs believers into wisdom by interceding before the Father on their behalf. Amazingly, the Spirit actually prays for (and in) believers when they themselves do not know what to pray (Rom 8:26–27).

The Christian life of wisdom

In this chapter, I have been arguing from a theological perspective that human beings are created, renewed, and transformed to be rational creatures before the Creator. In saying this, I am not thereby reducing human ethics and existence to *simply being rational and just*. As Alasdair MacIntyre has effectively demonstrated, such a reduction

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34. See also: Acts 10:3, 7, 10–16; 16:9–10; 22:17–18; 1 Cor 12:8–11; and 2 Cor 3:14–17.

would beg the question "*Whose* justice? *Which* rationality?"[35] Conversely, I have brought

'rational' into a dialogical relationship with 'ethical' and reoriented both to the eternal

Logos of God, which comes to human beings in the form of a personal address. Thus,

from a theological perspective, genuine rationality involves faithfully seeking the truth

and responsibly living it out in light of the knowledge and presence of God. This means

that genuine rationality and morality are oriented toward seeking and living what

Scripture calls *wisdom*. And the purpose of wisdom is to equip people to live out their

fundamental *telos* of knowing and loving God and fellow human beings. Thus, 'rational'

and 'ethical' are taken up into the biblical concept of wisdom and set within the context

of the wisdom community (chapter 7 discusses the church as a wisdom community).

C.   Faith and the rational ethical dimension

1.   Building trust, growing in love and wisdom

> "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Prov 9:10)
> "Perfect love drives out fear." (1 John 4:18)

Faith is not opposed to rationality; it is the doorway to a particular kind of

rationality.[36] The Old Testament proclaims that fear or reverence for the Lord is the

foundation for wisdom (e.g., Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7). Proverbs three gives several reasons

for this. First, wisdom comes from God because God is the source of all true wisdom.

Thus, we are exhorted to trust God and seek God's will rather than relying on our own

understanding (Prov 3:5–6). Second, by wisdom God created the universe. Proverbs

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35.   Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).

36.   This reflects the classic Christian emphasis on faith seeking understanding. For example, Anselm writes, "And so, Lord, who dost give understanding to faith, give me, so far as thou knowest it to be profitable, to understand that thou are as we believe; and that thou are that which we believe." Anselm, *Proslogium* (chapter 1) in *Proslogium; Monologium, An Appendix in Behalf of the Fool by Gaunilon, and Cur Deus Homo,* trans. Sidney Norton Deane (Chicago: Open Court, 1926), 6.

3:19–20 says: "By wisdom the Lord founded the earth; by understanding he established the heavens. By his knowledge the deep fountains of the earth burst forth, and the clouds poured down rain." Since God created the universe by wisdom, the universe has a rational structure with consistent physical properties and laws. Moreover, God's moral law orients the purpose and destiny of human beings. Third, reverence for the Lord is the beginning of wisdom because God is completely trustworthy (Prov 3:11–12). God is always good, just, faithful, gracious, merciful, and righteous. Furthermore, God corrects and disciplines those whom God loves. God's moral laws are not arbitrary but reveal and address the truth of the human condition. Thus, reverence for God lived out in faithful obedience to God's commands leads (generally or proverbially speaking) to health, long life, satisfaction, fulfilment, and finding favour with God and people (see throughout Prov 3).[37] Fourth, God is all powerful. Everything that God does reflects God's glory, majesty, and supreme justice. God's power and sovereignty should command our respect and elicit our contemplation, praise, and obedience. Further, as supreme Judge God curses the wicked but blesses the upright, which should motivate us toward obedience (Prov 3:33–35).

While fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, it is not the end of wisdom. Nor does it account for the full content of wisdom. The first letter of John says: "Perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. But the one who fears has not been made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18). Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, but love for God is the end or *telos* of wisdom. While God's Torah came to us through Moses, God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). As

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37. Such proverbial optimism is challenged and balanced within the wisdom corpus, particularly in Job and Ecclesiastes, with a stark acknowledgment of the injustice, unfairness, pain, and misery that often (and sometimes inexplicably) characterize human life.

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the definitive revelation of God, the Word and true Image of God, Jesus Christ came to reveal the full extent of the Father's love. Accordingly, Jesus taught that the greatest two commandments are to love God with all of one's heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love one's neighbour as oneself. The Apostle Paul similarly argues that loving one's neighbour summarizes all the commands of the Law (Gal 5:14). Since obeying God's commands ultimately has to do with loving God and others holistically in thought, word, and deed, the cultivation of wisdom aims toward transformation of heart and renovation of character.

2.   Command, character, and Christian ethics in a Trinitarian framework

Moral transformation takes place as we receive and obey God's commands, through the revelatory Word of the Son, in the love and power of the Holy Spirit. God's commands are the basis for theological ethics, because they reflect God's holiness, righteousness, and justice, as well as God's creative purposes for us and for creation. As Stanley Grenz argues, God has the prerogative to declare what it means to be human, precisely because God is the Creator and Origin of human life and existence.[38] God's commands, in turn, have their source and initiative in the Father's character and love for human beings and the created world. Our moral response to God is to reciprocate God's love, emulate God's character, and seek reverently to honour God with our lives.

Moral transformation occurs through the revelatory Word of the Son. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the one who fully reveals God's love and character to us. The Gospel of John tells us that although no one has ever seen God, the Word (*Logos*) has made God known to us (John 1:18). This Word is Jesus Christ, the only Son of the

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38.   Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 140–43.

Father. As such, Christ is the authoritative interpreter of God's commands.[39] This is

evident, for example, throughout the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus says several times

concerning the Mosaic Law: "You have heard it said. . . . *But I say* . . . ." In speaking this

way, Jesus implicitly claims to have the authority to interpret the Law definitively, an

authority which outranked the Pharisees and the religious teachers. As Kevin Vanhoozer

helpfully points out, Jesus authoritatively interprets the Old Testament Scriptures, while

the apostles go on to interpret Jesus's person and work according to the interpretive

patterns that Jesus himself implemented. Consequently, according to the precedent set by

Scripture itself, Christology becomes the key hermeneutical lens for interpreting and

integrating the canon. For Christians, this means that Jesus Christ is the source of our

knowledge of God and that faith in Jesus is the basis of our confidence in God's love and

character.

In addition, moral transformation occurs in the love and power of the Holy Spirit.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Holy Spirit is the living, personalizing, and

transforming power that is God's love. As such, the Spirit is both Person and Gift. As

Person, the Spirit is the third member of the Trinity who unites the Father and Son

together in perfect, ecstatic, perichoretic love. As Gift, the Holy Spirit is the one who

comes to reside within those who trust in Christ, as a seal of their salvation and a deposit

and foretaste of their final transformation in glory. The Holy Spirit is the one who fills

believers with God's love (the Spirit *is* God's Love) and who writes God's Law onto

their hearts. According to the Apostle Paul (notably in Romans 8, but elsewhere as well),

the filling of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is the transformative power that

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39. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 195.

regenerates and sustains, heals and sanctifies, guides and perfects the Christian's new life

in Christ. Being filled with the Spirit means being filled with the very Love of God. Thus,

it is the Spirit of God as Love who gradually drives out all fear and awakens the

believer's faith to grow in personal and loving trust in God. It is the Spirit who renews

the mind, renovates the heart, and invites us to respond by dedicating our lives to Christ.

The Spirit also binds Christians together in the community of faith and equips each

member to encourage and serve the others, so that they all "will be mature and full grown

in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ" (Eph 4:13). Following Christ daily

by obeying the Word of God in the power of the Spirit, within the context of the Christian

community as one participates in its distinctive worship and practices, gradually leads to

the cultivation of wisdom and the transformation of character (see chapters 7 and 8).

3.   Theology as knowing God and cultivating biblical wisdom

If, as I have argued, wisdom combines rationality with personal ethical

responsibility before God, then theology is crucial to the pursuit of Christian wisdom.

Theology is essentially faithful, disciplined, dialogical (prayerful), and doxological

reflection on the *Logos* of God as revealed in Christ by the Spirit. Moreover, there is a

deep connection between the *Logos* of God and the Bible as the written Word of God.[40]

Scripture as the authoritative written Word of God serves the divine *Logos* of God and

derives its inspired power from the Spirit of God. Consequently, knowledge of Scripture

is crucial for theological formation and for growth in Christian wisdom. Theologians

falling within the historic Christian tradition have always agreed that Scripture is an

important source for Christian belief and practice. Faithfulness to Scripture is particularly

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40. T. F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 6–13.

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important to theologians adhering to the broad evangelical tradition, as I do. But what is

the relationship between Scripture and Christian theology and ethics? There is a vast and

growing amount of literature dedicated to this question, which I will not survey here.[41] It

is beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a full-fledged hermeneutical theory. I will

restrict my discussion to some reflections on reading Scripture *theologically* as a rational-

ethical person, *in order to know God and cultivate wisdom.*

Theology and the knowledge of God

The purpose of theology is to know God and to make Him known to others.[42]

Knowledge of God is possible because God desires to be known and reveals himself in

Word and Spirit.[43] In the very beginning, the Word existed with God, and was in fact one

with God (John 1:1). Through the Word, all things were created and in the Word all

things hold together (Col 1:15). This Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John

1:14). Although no one has ever seen God, the Word, who is the very expression of God,

the very exegesis of God, has made God known (John 1:18). Thus, as Karl Barth

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41. See for example: A K. M. Adam, Stephen E. Fowl, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Francis Watson, *Reading Scripture with the Church. Toward a Hermeneutic for Theological Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006); Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); Stephen E. Fowl and Gregory Jones, *Reading in Communion: Scripture and Ethics in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier, and N. T. Wright, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005); Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) and *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

42. Peter Jensen, "The Teacher as Theologian in Theological Education," *Reformed Theological Review* 50 (Sept.—Dec., 1991): 83.

43. John Webster argues that "in all of their variety the biblical writings together constitute a unified divine act of communication—a single, though rich, complex and historically extended, divine word from which a coherent body of teaching can be drawn." John Webster, "Biblical Theology and the Clarity of Scripture," in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Mary Healy, Karl Möller, and Robin Parry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan / Milton Keynes: UK, 2004), 352.

proposes, the principal task of theology is to hear and respond to the Word of God.[44] This Word of God is the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the Son of God, who creates, arouses and challenges all human theological words.[45] Theology is dependent on Christ for its very existence and continuance. It is not primarily a creative act (i.e., our creation), but rather a "response and praise to the Creator."[46] It is not merely a formulation of our thoughts about God, but our response to God's self-revelation to us. God accomplished this revelation objectively in human history in Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the calling of Israel.[47]

Moreover, it is the Spirit of God who makes the hearing of the Word possible. To speak intelligibly is to expire one's breath, forming and shaping it with one's words. Similarly, the Father's speech to us is animated by the breath of the Holy Spirit and given articulate expression by the Word. The Father sends the Spirit to teach us all things and to remind us of the words of the Son (John 14:26). The Spirit enables us to experience this Word as a living reality. No one can understand the Word of God apart from the Spirit of God. In this respect, our knowledge and experience of God is no different from that of the first disciples of Jesus, who knew the truth only because God chose to reveal it to them through the Word in the Spirit (Matt 16:17; Luke 10:21–22; John 12:37–41). The Spirit of God also empowers us to become witnesses of the Word, and sends us to the ends of the earth to proclaim the good news (Acts 1:8). Theology serves this evangelistic ministry of the Spirit, striving to articulate the reality of God in a contextual and relevant way.

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44. Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 17.
45. Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 17.
46. Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 17.
47. Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 20.

Knowledge of God is deeply connected to knowledge of oneself; indeed, God-knowledge and self-knowledge arise and fall together.[48] Without knowledge of God, knowledge of oneself is distorted and ultimately impossible. To know God as Creator, Reconciler, and Transformer is to know oneself as creature, sinner, and finite, dependent on God for one's existence in past, present, and future. Thus, knowing God means loving and obeying God. To reject knowledge of God is to conceive of *oneself* as creator, redeemer, and transformer, *oneself* as the source of one's own life, salvation, and sustenance.[49] This is the condition of sin. The more one rejects the light of the knowledge of God, the more one walks in darkness.[50] Ultimately, to reject the revealed knowledge of God is to be imprisoned by a self-fashioned ego, a heart and mind turned in upon itself, an oppressive and self-referential human *logos*.[51] However, the knowledge of God, made possible by Christ's saving work and the Spirit's quickening of the soul, renews both heart and mind and realigns our lives around God as the centre and source of our existence (Rom 12:1-2). This fundamental transformation of the mind, which leads to a reorientation of one's actions, is what the biblical authors call repentance.[52] Accordingly theology, which seeks to articulate the knowledge of God coherently and concretely in

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48.   Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* III.1 in *ANF02: Fathers of the Second Century Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: CCEL, 2004), 271; Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine*, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 44; Anselm, *Proslogium*, 4–5; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* I.1, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 37–39.

49.   No one is naïvely ignorant of God, rather knowledge of God is suppressed by human pride (Rom 1:18). We are all guilty of this and in need of redemption.

50.   I am not speaking here about 'righteous Gentiles,' who respond in varying degrees to general revelation and obey God without knowing it (Rom 2:14). I am speaking about active suppression and rejection of revelation.

51.   It is, as Bonhoeffer says, to bear the burden of judging good and evil for ourselves in autonomy from God who is the true and ultimate source of goodness (*Ethics*, 308).

52.   Mark J. Boda and Gordon T. Smith, eds., *Repentance in Christian Theology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006). The basic definition of repentance, which is a fundamental change in thinking leading to a fundamental change in behaviour and/or way of living, appears consistently throughout this book.

particular contexts, aims at *conversion*, or, as D. A. Carson puts it, at "worldview

transformation" at both a personal and a communal level.[53] In this effort, theology's job

is never finished, because it is continually pressed by changing contexts to articulate the

knowledge of God clearly and faithfully as new situations, challenges, and advances in

human knowledge develop.[54] Such knowledge is not merely the accumulation of

information but the formulation of wisdom. Kevin Vanhoozer proposes,

> Doctrine has a cognitive component, for we must understand what God has done
> for our salvation . . . , but the thrust of Christian doctrine is not mere knowledge,
> but rather wisdom: we demonstrate our understanding by speaking and acting in
> manners that correspond to reality as it is disclosed by (and being conformed to)
> Jesus Christ.[55]

Thus, the ultimate foundation for the knowledge of God, and hence for theology, is the

Incarnate Word of God, who by the Spirit of God reveals the Father. But how do we

access this Word of God? In other words, what instruments are employed by the Word in

his self-communication to us? What are the penultimate foundations for theology?

Knowing God through Scripture, religious experience, tradition, and reason

a)   *Scripture*

For those raised in an evangelical tradition, it may seem alarming that I refer to

Scripture as a penultimate or secondary foundation for theology. All I mean by this is that

Scripture serves the Word of God and depends on the Spirit of God for its inspired power

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53. D. A. Carson, "Systematic and Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed.
T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 102.

54. I. Howard Marshall, *Beyond the Bible. Moving from Scripture to Theology* (Grand Rapids:
Baker, 2004), 71. Marshall writes, theology "enables believers to develop the implications of their faith and
to come to fresh insights to deal with new knowledge and the danger of false belief."

55. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Into the Great Beyond: A Theologian's Response to the Marshall Plan," in
Beyond the Bible, 87–88.

and authority. It is secondary in the sense that it is not a member of the Trinity.[56]

Scripture is God's primary and authoritative means of communicating the knowledge of God to human beings. The writers of the Old and New Testaments are the primary witnesses of God's actions in history.[57] As such, the biblical writers claim ultimate authority over all human speech concerning God and are sought after to measure the authenticity of all subsequent God-talk or theologizing. Accordingly, theological discourse can never be elevated above the biblical witnesses. Theology serves the written Word of God at a fundamental level.[58] Devotion to Scripture is a necessary element of loyalty to Christ.[59] Thus, as J. I. Packer argues, evangelical theology defends Holy Scripture as the final authority for theology (though not its only source).[60] This is in contrast both to those who appeal to church tradition as a final authority and to those who elevate human reason to such a position (Packer cites Catholicism as an example of the former and Liberalism as epitomizing the latter).[61] Kevin Vanhoozer proposes a more nuanced comparison, contrasting his dramatic canonical-linguistic approach with reductionist approaches to theology, including theology as collecting and systematizing

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56. T. F. Torrance writes, "whereas in Jesus Christ the divine Word and human word are united within one Person, that is, hypostatically, in the Bible the divine Word and the human word are only united through dependence upon and participation in Christ, that is, sacramentally." Torrance, *Divine Meaning*, 7.

57. The biblical authors are more than just witnesses of something external to them. They are participants by the Spirit in God's revelatory speech and action. See Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 5.

58. Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 31.

59. J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 21. As Stassen and Gushee point out, Jesus himself affirmed the authority of the Scriptures (*Kingdom Ethics*, 84–90). Likewise, Packer observes that Jesus explicitly acknowledged the authority of the Old Testament as the foundation for his ministry (i.e., Matt 5: 17–20; Luke 4:18–21, 24:44). Similarly, the Apostles proclaimed that Christianity is the fulfillment of Scripture. Finally, the early church regarded the apostolic teaching and the Old Testament scripture as two complementary components of God's Word.

60. As Vanhoozer points out, the Reformation notion of *sola scriptura* does not rule out tradition as a legitimate source for theology. Rather, "To practice sola scriptura is to treat Scripture alone as the 'norming norm' and tradition as the 'normed norm'" (*The Drama of Doctrine*, 234). Church tradition has provisional ministerial authority but not ultimate authority, which is reserved for Scripture.

61. Packer, *Fundamentalism*, 46, 58–62.

biblical propositions (e.g., Hodge; C. F. Henry), as witness to present and personal

revelation (e.g., Barth), as the expression of religious experience (e.g., Schleiermacher),

and as speech about church practices and traditions (e.g., Lindbeck).[62] Vanhoozer aims to

incorporate the insights of Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic model over-against

propositionalism (emphasizing the importance of the interpretive community's traditions

and practices) while simultaneously (against Lindbeck) maintaining the ultimate

authority of Scripture as God's self-communicative Word, which refers beyond itself and

the Christian community to the reality of God.[63] My own view corresponds closely with

Vanhoozer's proposal.

b)   *Experience of the Holy Spirit*

Only God can reveal God's self directly: God is the source of revelation, the

content of revelation, and the recipient of revelation (indwelling the believer by the

Spirit). As Barth says, "Revelation is therefore summons and empowerment."[64] God

shares God's very life with us by giving us the Spirit, who resides within us and writes

the Word of God onto our hearts. The Holy Spirit operates on at least two levels in

mediating the knowledge of God we receive through the Scriptures. First, the Holy Spirit

is the author of Scripture. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is inspired by God

and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."

The Holy Spirit is the one who *inspired* Scripture (past action), who animated and spoke

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62.   Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 4–7. Vanhoozer describes his work, over-against both conservatism and postliberalism, as a postconservative, canonical-linguistic theology and a directive theory of doctrine that roots theology more firmly in Scripture while preserving an emphasis on practice (xiii).

63.   Articulating a similar concern, Clark Pinnock writes, "Revelation is neither contentless experience (liberalism) nor timeless propositions (conservatism). It is the dynamic self-disclosure of God, who makes his goodness known in the history of salvation, in a process of disclosure culminating in Jesus Christ. Revelation is not primarily existential impact or infallible truths but divine self-revelation that both impacts and instructs. The mode of revelation is self-disclosure and interpersonal communication." Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love. A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 226.

64.   Webster, "Biblical Theology," 376.

it into being. This does not mean that the Spirit dictated the words of Scripture to the

biblical authors, but rather the Spirit breathed the communicative presence of God into

their hearts and minds and guided their written articulation as they expressed the Word of

God through their own literary capacity and creativity. The Holy Spirit is also the one

who vivifies and applies Scripture to its hearers and readers (a present, even presenc*ing*

action). The Spirit impresses Scripture onto their minds and renders it clear.[65] Moreover,

by the power of the Spirit, Scripture gains a performative function—it actually

accomplishes something in the hearer or reader. In this sense, an encounter with Scripture

is a faith-*event*: something transpires; something happens. By this encounter with God

through the Scriptures, believers are taught, rebuked, corrected, trained in righteousness,

and generally equipped for every good work (1 Tim 3:16–17).

Second, the Holy Spirit directly speaks, guides, and empowers Christians in their

daily thinking and acting (illumination). In this work, the Spirit does not contradict the

Word of God (the Spirit remains consistent with what has already been revealed), but the

Spirit may disturb and stir up one's current *understanding or interpretation* of past

revelation. While the Word is embodied and tends toward unity and systemization, the

Spirit is fluid and tends to disrupt systems and structures with God's dynamic presence.

The implication of this for theology is that true theology is about a relationship. It is the

fruit of one's communion with the Living God and must be pursued in the context of faith

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65. John Webster writes, "the coherent teaching that Scripture sets forth can be discerned by the Spirit-directed use of interpreted reason in the communion of saints." Webster, "Biblical Theology," 353. Webster's article helpfully grounds the clarity of Scripture in the self-communicative presence of God. However, he describes this clarity almost exclusively in terms of the inherent qualities of the Word, the second person of the Trinity, such as his being light and truth (p. 359). Webster's position here is pneumatologically deficient. I would have liked to see Webster explicitly develop the relationship between Word and Spirit, particularly the latter's critical role in both inspiring (originally) and illuminating (presently) the written Word. See Pinnock's helpful discussion of Spirit inspiration and illumination in *Flame of Love*, 227–31.

and prayer and expressed in reverence, adoration, joy, longing, lamentation, expectation, and perseverance—in short, it must be an expression of holy love. As Gregory of Nyssa said, "concepts create idols. Only wonder understands."[66] Flowing from *communion with God*, theology is knowable yet provisional, true yet finite, dependable yet contextual, and for the present yet open to the future.

c)   *Tradition*

Christianity is a faith that rests on historical truth claims. "If Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain," the apostle forcefully asserts (1 Cor 15:14). The church, as the community of God, is a secondary witness of God's revelation (subsequent to Word and Spirit). This means that tradition holds an important place in theological reflection and articulation, and hence also for biblical exegesis. The church's commission is to reflect theologically on the Word of God, engaging in exegesis, church history, dogmatics, ethics, and so forth (aided by its theologians), and to proclaim God's Word in its contemporary setting. Consequently, communal discernment plays an important role in theology. Theologians must be in conversation with other theologians, both past and present, as well as with creeds, confessions, and other historical Christian narratives and accounts of the past. Using a dramatic analogy, Kevin Vanhoozer helpfully likens the biblical canon to the authoritative script of a play and the great church tradition to faithful historical performances of that script guided by theological wisdom. Such wisdom involves a kind

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66. Quoted from Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 73.

of faithful improvisation, which is guided by theological *phronesis* or practical reasoning

that is sustained by relevant virtues (see below concerning *phronesis* and virtue).[67]

Theology's foundation upon tradition means that it must *primarily* serve the

church (not just professional academic theologians).[68] This does not require theology to

be subservient to, or at the disposal of, the church—mere ecclesial propaganda as it were.

Theology serves the church because the church is dependent on the Word for its existence

and understanding and applying the Word requires theology. In other words, theology

serves the church in order to help sustain the church's life. In serving the church in this

way, theology claims a degree of autonomy (but not separation) in order to call the

church to faithfulness in doctrine and practice. Furthermore, in serving the church,

theology must aim to speak to the richness and variety of the whole people of God. It

should promote, inform, and equip all believers in the use of their distinct abilities and

spiritual gifts, and show them how each one fits into God's redemptive activity.

d)   Reason

The present emphasis on revelation does not negate the necessary and helpful

place of reason in theology.[69] As Lesslie Newbigin argued, "It is not (as so often said) a

question of reason versus revelation. It is a question of the data upon which reason has to

work."[70] Indeed, "reason can only work with the data that it is given."[71] It is a means, not

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67.   Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 152.

68.   John Webster writes, "The sphere of the clarity of Holy Scripture is the church, the creature of the Word of God; by the Word the church is generated and preserved, and by the Spirit the church sets forth the clear Word of God in traditions of holy attentiveness." Webster, "Biblical Theology," 369.

69.   Pannenberg offers a helpful critique and modification of Barth's view of revelation, which Pannenberg argues is too limited (to present/existential, personal, I-Thou revelation) and fails to account for the breadth and complexity of revelation as we actually observe it in Scripture. Pannenberg surveys five different types of revelatory experiences recorded in the Bible. See Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), chapter 4, esp. pp. 206–11.

70.   Lesslie Newbigin, *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth* (London: SPCK, 1991), 24.

an end; it is a tool, not a final product. Because God is the Creator and source of truth, all truth is God's truth. God desires that we love God not only with our affections, but also with our minds. God has created a reasonable world, a phenomenal reality with a rational structure (though reason cannot account for the wholeness of reality).[72] This has at least two implications for theology. First, theology should be coherent and consistent. God's promises and God's actions are trustworthy and dependable. Therefore, our reflection on what God has revealed and enacted should be rational, even as it glories in wonder. Here, there is much to be learned in dialogue with such disciplines as philosophy, mathematics, physics and other abstract sciences. Second, theology should be consistent with empirical reality. In other words, it should be verifiable through experience and rational inquiry. Hence, theology can benefit from the insights of the social sciences, the human sciences, and the arts. To be clear, I am not saying that theology can always be immediately verifiable, or that it always corresponds perfectly with empirical experience (which is itself open to various interpretations). What I am suggesting is that a disjuncture between theology and empirical inquiry should occasion a pause; it should unveil an opportunity for further questioning, hypothesizing, reflecting and, if necessary, reformulating.[73] It should also be stressed that this dialogical relationship between theology and empirical

71. Newbigin, *Truth to Tell*, 20.

72. Alvin Plantinga speaks of the "design plan" of the human mind, appealing to the doctrine of creation to argue that God formed the world to be rational and the human mind to interact rationally and truthfully with it (though this relationship is distorted by human corruption). See his *Warrant and Proper Function* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Vanhoozer explains Plantinga's view as follows: "God has created human beings so that their cognitive faculties will yield true beliefs, given optimal conditions and proper functioning. Plantinga argues that we are warranted in holding a belief if it is the product of reliable belief-forming cognitive mechanisms (e.g., perception, memory). Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 302.

73. For example, the discovery of Copernicus was a growth opportunity for both theology and science. If such opportunities are embraced, both theology and science come to a better understanding of their object, whether that means better interpretation of the Scriptures for the former (one level of reality) or a better model of physics for the latter (another level of reality).

reasoning goes both ways. Sometimes science will question the expositions of theology because they do not seem to fit the facts; at other times theology will question science regarding its assumptions and interpretations of the facts.

Theology as wisdom cultivation for the faithful performance of Scripture

In recent years, an increasing number of theologians and biblical scholars have stressed that biblical interpretation is an inherently *ethical activity*. This means that ethics is not simply the product of interpretation; ethics also informs and guides interpretation. The process is not strictly linear in either direction but dialogical, as faith seeking greater understanding and wisdom (and open to correction). Given the theological anthropology developed in this dissertation, this is not surprising: if biblical interpretation is a *human* practice and if being human involves— intrinsically and inescapably—an ethical dimension, then the interpretive task must also be considered an ethical task. This observation accords well with Scripture. In the writings of the biblical authors, doctrine and ethics cannot be separated practically (even while they can be differentiated logically). Jesus implied as much when he said that the point is not merely to hear the Word, but to hear *and* obey it (Luke 11:28). Elsewhere, he asserted that those who hear his words but do not obey them are foolishly building their lives upon a precarious foundation, while those who hear and obey him are wisely building upon a sure and stable foundation (Luke 7:26–27). Likewise, the letter of James tells us that anyone who hears the Word but does not obey it is like a man who sees his reflection in a mirror but immediately forgets what he looks like when he walks away. James calls this way of thinking self-deception and contrasts it with a truly blessed life that comes from obeying God's Word (Jas 1:22–25). Second Timothy 3:16–17 teaches the inspiration of Scripture

but emphasizes what the inspired Word accomplishes ethically in its hearer/reader. In addition, the structure and theology of the Pauline epistles maintain an intimate connection between God's gracious initiative in Christ and the ethical response that God's grace calls forth in those who are now "in Christ" (e.g. Rom 6; Eph 2:8–10; Phil 2:5–11, 3:12–14).[74]

If biblical interpretation is an inherently theological-ethical activity of knowing God and cultivating wisdom, what kind of ethical framework is most fitting and what kinds of methodological implications does this have for interpreters? I suggest that the approach that best accounts for the depth and variety of Scripture is a character or virtue ethics framework.[75] There are several reasons for this. A character framework can appropriate insights from other ethical approaches. For instance, it can employ consequentialist reasoning to weigh pros and cons and to ask questions about the common good. It can employ Kantian reasoning in order to articulate general ethical principles. Or it can listen to divine commands with an expressed desire to obey the will of God. However, at its most comprehensive level, its focus is not on following

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74. Burridge argues that Paul's imperatives of obedience always flow out of his indicatives of grace (*Imitating Jesus*, 105–7).

75. Joseph Kotva argues that virtue theory offers an ethical framework that is notably suited to Christian convictions, modes of reasoning, and ongoing moral reflection. In addition, it: (1) helpfully resists reductionist pressures by providing an integrated, multi-faceted account of the moral life; (2) helps us explores themes absent from Scripture and theology (e.g., friendship); it informs our reading and use of Scripture (particularly the Bible's role in the moral life); and (4) virtue theory and Christian convictions are mutually edifying (Christian thought can help correct and enrich virtue theory, especially with an emphasis on grace and a richer account of the human telos informed by Christology, anthropology, creation, revelation, etc.). See Joseph J. Kotva, Jr., *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996), especially chapter 7. Others promoting a virtue approach (in different variations) include Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*; Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*; Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*; Stanley Hauerwas (among other books), Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character. Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament· Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996); and Daniel J. Treier, *Virtue and the Voice of God: Toward Theology as Wisdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

commands or articulating rules and principles, but on *forming ethical people*—the kind of

people who desire God's good and chose to act ethically.

A character ethics approach to exegesis also resonates most with the approach that

Jesus took. Jesus recognized the important but limited place for rules (e.g., John 14:15)

but emphasized the transformation of the heart. We see this in Jesus's teaching, for

example in the following words:

> No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is
> recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes
> from briers. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his
> heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For
> out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks (Luke 6:43–45).

Jesus argues that good works flow from a good heart like good fruit flows from a good

tree. A few worm-infested apples do not make a whole tree bad, but an infected root

spoils all of the fruit. In the same way, a person whose heart has been made good may

still have some rough edges, but gradually their whole life is renewed and transformed

from the inside-out.[76] Jesus's stress on character formation is also apparent in his decision

to call a group of disciples to follow him and learn from him. As Burridge argues, the

gospels encourage their readers to imitate the words and deeds of Christ within an

inclusive Christian community.[77] Likewise, the Apostle Paul encourages his readers to

imitate the example of Christ (Phil 2:5–10) as well as his own example (1 Cor 4:16).

Neither Jesus nor Paul promotes mindless mimicking; what they endorse is learning from

the Lord and from other disciples what it means to live in accordance with Christ's death

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76. Martin Luther comments on this passage and provides a similar analogy: A well constructed building does not make its builder 'good,' rather a good builder produces well constructed buildings. See Martin Luther, *On Christian Liberty*, trans. W. A. Lambert and Harold J. Grimm (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 39–40, 46.

77. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 388–94.

and in hope of his resurrection.[78] These exhortations to imitate Christ and others support

the emphasis in character ethics on the importance of training and mentoring for

equipping people to act wisely and consistently in complex and novel situations.[79] In

addition, the New Testament emphasis on learning from others fits well with a character

ethics stress on the formative role that communities play in ethical development (see

chapter 8).[80]

Moreover, a character ethics approach can account for the diversity seen in the

various types of ethical claims the Bible makes. In their book *Kingdom Ethics*, Glen

Stassen and David Gushee argue that four levels of ethical reasoning can be observed in

Scripture, including immediate judgements, rules, principles, and basic convictions.[81] At

the level of immediate judgment, a moral decision applies to one particular case and the

decision maker provides no reasons for the judgment. For example, someone might say

something like, "I don't know why it is wrong; I just know that it is wrong." Often such

judgments are based upon underlying rules, principles and convictions, but are made

instinctually in a given moment. To focus exclusively on immediate judgments is to

endorse an emotivist (i.e., stressing preference) or an existentialist (i.e., stressing

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78. Fowl discusses the importance of imitating Christ and other Christian exemplars for forming Christian character in *Engaging Scripture*, 190–96.

79. Learning a trade is a good example of this. While an electrician must study the basic rules and principles about electricity, such knowledge is not sufficient. The student must also learn to be an electrician by spending thousands of hours in practice as an apprentice under the guidance of a mentor. Through such practice and guidance, the apprentice gradually acquires a tacit sense for how to make decisions, apply knowledge, and employ skills that are intrinsic to the trade. In a similar way, biblical interpretation does not tell us how we should respond in every situation (the Bible simply does not address explicitly many of the issues that modern people face), but it forms equips our hearts and minds to respond appropriately and faithfully.

80. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 191, 215–25.

81. Glen Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics. Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 100–7.

decision) ethics approach.[82] Moral judgment at the rules level consists in creating and

obeying rules, which apply universally in the form of direct commands and prohibitions.

An example of this is the commandment "You shall not murder," a rule that Jesus quoted

favourably in the Sermon on the Mount. If one's moral focus is on rules alone one falls

prey to legalism, which is essentially detaching rules from their underlying principles.[83]

The next level of moral reasoning is principles, which have two characteristics. First,

while rules explain and critique immediate judgements, principles explain and critique

rules. Second, principles are more general than rules and do not tell us specifically what

to do. If one makes principles the sole focus of ethics, one falls into what Stassen and

Gushee call 'principlism.' Two main problems with principlism are that it rejects the

legitimacy of rules (yet Jesus clearly endorsed some rules, hence principlism could lead

us to ignore the direct commands of Christ) and that sometimes principles conflict with

other principles (hence their resolution requires deeper theological commitments and

basic convictions).[84] The final level of reasoning consists of basic convictions, which are

ultimate commitments that provide the basis for evaluating and obeying principles and

rules. According to Stassen and Gushee, God's character, actions, and will constitute the

basic conviction level for Christians.

Each of these four modes of judgment can be correlated roughly with a

corresponding level of interpretive strategy. Thus, one could legitimately read Scripture

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82. Stassen and Gushee call a fixation at the level of immediate judgement a "situation ethics approach." Such an approach assumes that actions in themselves are neither right nor wrong and that situations are far too complex to speak generally about specific moral rules. Thus, situation ethics rejects the articulation and application of universal moral rules (*Kingdom Ethics*. 107–8). I have avoided the term "situation ethics," which might restrict the discussion to the views of Joseph Fletcher who coined the term. My intention is not to discuss Fletcher but to describe a type of approach that avoids general rules and principles in favour of immediate contexts or circumstances and judgments therein.

83. Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 109–11.

84. Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 111–13.

at an immediate judgment or instinctual level (many Christians do this daily in their devotional reading), but a fixation on this level promotes a radical reader-response approach (akin to emotivist or existentialist ethics). Yet one could also read Scripture on the level of applying exegetical rules and methods, but without underlying principles and convictions such efforts are in danger of becoming mechanistic and question-begging (akin to legalism). Or one could read Scripture on the level of hermeneutical principles or lenses, but a fixation at this level can lead to suppressing the uniqueness of particular texts in favour of preconceived norms and patterns (akin to principlism).[85] Finally, one can read Scripture on the level of basic convictions, but without also applying instincts, exegetical methods, and hermeneutical insights, such an approach runs the risk of reading abstract theological ideas into the text (promoting 'system addicts', to borrow a phrase from Trevor Hart).[86] In contrast to a narrow focus on just one of these, a character approach provides the overall framework in which all four of these modes of judgment can be employed appropriately, according to their contexts.[87] All four levels are important and useful, being connected and grounded in the presence of the Living Christ through the Holy Spirit.[88] A character ethics approach thus accounts for the complexity of

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85. John Webster expresses the concern that a preoccupation with hermeneutical issues will distract readers from their responsibility to be obedient: "[T]he task of the church is best understood not as speaking meaningfully but as speaking obediently, that is, speaking in a manner appropriate to the fact that God is not a mute reality to be called into presence by language or practice, but the eternally creative and active Word." John Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 125.

86. Trevor Hart, "Systematic – In What Sense?" In *Out of Egypt. Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 341.

87. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 390.

88. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 25–29, 78. Burridge's suggestion captures the uniqueness of Christian ethics as a personal and communal (i.e., ecclesial) response to the Living God who became man, the Word made flesh. It also emphasizes the crucial importance of holding together *who* Christ is with *what* he said and did. To separate these is to make concrete Christian faith and discipleship into an (un-Christian) abstraction that is foreign to the New Testament. Finally, it highlights the communal (and ecclesial) nature of ethical formation and judgment. Jesus did more than teach with words and deeds; He also created a new community within which his example and teachings could be learned and practiced.

the interpretive endeavour. It underscores the fact that good interpretation requires not merely the acquisition of skills but also (and more importantly) the cultivation of virtues, such as humility and charity, and the exercise of practical reasoning or *phronesis*.

Virtues and biblical interpretation

A character approach to biblical exegesis requires the cultivation of virtues. According to Alasdair MacIntyre, virtues are human qualities that meet three criteria. First, a virtue is a quality necessary for achieving the goods internal to what MacIntyre calls 'practices.'[89] A practice is a complex and coherent form of a socially established human activity, the excellent pursuit of which leads inherently to the attainment of the goods that are uniquely related to and acquired through it.[90] Second, a virtue must be holistic, contributing to the good of a whole human life and not merely the periphery of existence.[91] It is comprehensive in scope, and not limited to certain activities (like skills). Third, virtues can be conceived only within a received living tradition.[92] A living tradition is a "socially embodied argument" that is based upon a particular conception of the *telos* of human life and plays a constitutive role in identity formation. According to MacIntyre, one can never seek the good in isolation from others, not least because one's ethical worldview depends on the formative role others play. Social traditions and virtues are interdependent: traditions shape the understanding of virtues, while the virtues animate and sustain traditions.

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89. MacIntyre. *After Virtue*, 191.

90. MacIntyre cites the game of Chess as an example of a practice. Virtues of Chess are those qualities that enable practitioners to attain the goods internal to playing the game. Internal goods are those which derive naturally and uniquely from the practice itself. Thus, a financial reward for winning a chess tournament is not an internal good, because both winning and money can be pursued in other ways. At the level of 'practice' alone, MacIntyre's conception of virtue is closely related to an intrinsic orientation (both desire and effort) toward excellence.

91. MacIntyre, *After* Virtue, 215–19.

92. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 220–25.

One implication of MacIntyre's discussion of virtues for biblical interpretation follows from his distinction between complex 'practices' and mere 'skills.' According to such a distinction, exegesis alone (especially when narrowed to exegetical method) does not qualify as a practice; it is merely a skill. Exegetical principles and methodologies are too general and often too value-neutral to be considered practices in MacIntyre's sense (especially those claiming to be purely objective or descriptive). This observation challenges the idea that one can interpret the Bible simply by applying rules and methods of interpretation (literary, linguistic, etc.) to Holy Scripture in a value-neutral or non-theological manner. Such methodologies might well provide useful and interesting insights, but they do not amount to the theological-ethical *practice* of biblical interpretation. The latter requires cultivating and indwelling interpretive virtues, which are those qualities that are necessary for achieving the goods that are internal to the practice of biblical interpretation.[93] Another implication of MacIntyre's discussion of virtues is that biblical interpretation, as an intrinsically ethical activity, can be practiced faithfully only within a received social, living tradition that teaches and embodies a particular conception of the *telos* of human life.[94] MacIntyre's observation can be applied

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93. While a full discussion of such virtues would require a more extensive treatment, we might begin by citing three fundamental Christian virtues, namely faith, hope, and love/charity. Fowl argues for the primacy of charity or love (Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, 86–91). Fowl is careful to stress that these virtues do not eliminate interpretive disagreements in the church (which can be healthy), but they foster the kind of context in which disagreements can best be articulated, debated, and provisionally resolved. In addition, since biblical interpretation is a pneumatological event (especially in a theological-ethical approach), one would expect its intrinsic virtues to include the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22–23). Such qualities fit MacIntyre's criterion that virtues must be holistic, contributing to the whole of life and not merely peripheral or isolated activities disconnected from life. Vanhoozer argues that proper interpretation involves being apprenticed by the canon itself though canonical practices of interpretation, especially the patterns and precedents set by Jesus and then Paul (*The Drama of Doctrine*, part 3, chapters 9–10).

94. This dissertation argues that the *telos* of human life has three basic dimensions—relational, rational, and eschatological, which correspond to the meaning of human personhood.

to highlight the significance of the church as a necessary context for the practice of biblical interpretation.[95]

Practical reasoning (phronesis) and biblical interpretation

In his preface to the *Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible*, R. R. Reno suggests that theological interpretation depends not primarily on employing particular exegetical methodologies but on being the kind of person that has cultivated wisdom through spiritual, theological, and ecclesial formation. In particular, Reno argues that such people are trained in the Nicene tradition, by which he means not merely learning a set of words and creeds but "a pervasive habit of thought" and "the animating culture of the church in its intellectual aspect."[96] Stephen Fowl endorses a similar view when he argues for the priority of character in theological interpretation. In his approach, rules, methods, and skills are tools that interpreters with well-formed character employ through *phronesis* or practical reasoning. Such reasoning is not the same as 'pure' or 'objective' rationalism, but is "a pattern of thinking, feeling, and acting" in appropriate ways. According to Fowl, a Christian's employment of *phronesis* is appropriate when it conforms to Christ, in particular to the pattern of his death and resurrection.[97] Furthermore, Fowl argues that one of the primary tasks of practical reasoning is acquiring proper vision or, in other words, learning how to see things in the right way.[98] For example, drawing on the book of Philippians, Fowl contrasts the *phronesis* of those

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95. Francis Watson argues that the church is the preliminary reading community within which Holy Scripture is located (*Text, Church and World*, 13). See also Fowl, who argues that understanding the Spirit's work is a matter of communal discernment and debate, which occurs over time and is often shaped by prior interpretations of Scripture as well as by beliefs and practices (*Engaging Scripture*, 114).

96. R. R. Reno, "Series Preface," in *Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 12. This is because doctrine is most powerful when it is a habit of the mind, not merely the repetition of abstract propositions.

97. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, 190–96.

98. Fowl cites Jesus's discussion of the eye as a lamp to the whole body, which brings light or darkness to one's whole life (Matt 6:22–23; Cf. Luke 11:34–36). See *Engaging Scripture*, 75–83.

whose citizenship is in heaven with the *phronesis* of those who are preoccupied with

worldly concerns.[99]

Recently, a number of theologians have proposed performance models (usually

musical or dramatic) to depict the integration of *phronesis*, virtue, and exegetical

proficiency.[100] Kevin Vanhoozer proposes a 'canonical-linguistic' model that depicts the

theological task as participating in God's theo-drama. His desire is to move theology

beyond mere theoretical knowledge and reorient it toward Christian wisdom, which

unites theory and practice.[101] In Vanhoozer's dramatic analogy, God is the *playwright*,

the gospel corresponds to *God's theo-drama* (God's redemptive speech and actions

culminating in Christ), the canon to the authoritative *script*, the Holy Spirit to the *director*

of the play (with pastors and elders serving as *assistant directors*), and doctrine as

direction or stage prompts that enable the actors to perform the script and improvise

faithfully upon it.[102] In this scheme, the role of the theologian corresponds to the role of

the *dramaturge*, who in theatrical contexts is the person responsible for helping the

director (in the church's case, the assistant directors—pastors, elders) to make sense of

the script both for the actors (the congregation) and the audience (the world to which the

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99.   He then discusses the significance of Baptism, Eucharist, catechism, and liturgy for the formation of a phronesis that "knows the power of Christ's resurrection" and "shares in his sufferings" (Fowl, *Engaging Scripture*, 196, 200–2).

100.   For example: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-drama Theological Dramatic Theory*, vols. 1–4 (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1998–94); Samuel Wells, *Improvisation The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004).

101.   Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 13. He explains, "The canonical-linguistic approach to theology has as its goal the training of competent and truthful witnesses who can themselves incarnate, in a variety of situations, the wisdom of Christ gleaned from indwelling canonical practices and their ecclesial continuations" (p. 25).

102.   Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 107, 243–44. More specifically, "Doctrine helps the people of God to participate fittingly in the drama of redemption, and so to be true and faithful witnesses to God's incarnate wisdom" (p. 25). For, "If theology is about the speech and action of the triune God and the church's response in word and deed, then doctrine is best viewed as direction for the church's fitting participation in the drama of redemption" (p. 31).

gospel is proclaimed and demonstrated).[103] Vanhoozer notes that this twofold

responsibility of the dramaturge parallels the twofold task of theology, namely exegetical

scientia (interpretive skills, methods, techniques, etc.) and practical *sapientia* (wisdom

for life and missional context).[104] He contrasts the way his dramaturge model depicts the

relationship of theologian to Scripture with other influential models, including the

theologian as scientist (e.g., Hodge), as poet (e.g., Barr, McFague), and as ethnographer

(e.g., Lindbeck).[105]

Vanhoozer's notion of theology as a dramatic enterprise fruitfully combines

knowing (propositional, tacit, communal), doing (personal ethical agency), and being

(cultivating virtue to enable the faithful exercise of practical reasoning in alignment with

canonical patterns). Moreover, it retains an emphasis on biblical authority, even while

recognizing the crucial role of tradition, community, and church practices for the genuine

theological endeavour. Finally, Vanhoozer's approach provides a fitting model for a

character-ethics approach to biblical interpretation. Such an approach focuses on

Scripture's primary subject matter (God's self-revelation in the unfolding of the theo-

drama) and the *telos* it implies for reading and performing Scripture—which is *to know*

and love God and to participate fittingly and faithfully in God's ongoing story through

the cultivation of biblical-theological wisdom. To recall what was said earlier in the

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103. The Holy Spirit, as the main Director, plays a crucial role in the drama: "*The Holy Spirit is both the author of the script and the one who guides the church's contemporary performance—its improvisatory variations—on the script.* The Spirit employs doctrine, too, to serve the church insofar as it helps in understanding the theo-drama. *The drama of doctrine consists in the Spirit's directing the church rightly to participate in the evangelical action by performing its authoritative script*" (p. 102; emphasis original).

104. In part three of the book, Vanhoozer outlines six features of the canonical-linguistic approach. The first three concern the *sciential* aspects of the theologian's task (with relation to the biblical text): postpropositionalist, postconservative, and postfoundational. The second three concern the sapiential aspects of the theologian's task: prosaic (contextual, 'in' but not 'of' the world), phronetic (employing theological *phronesis* to deliberate well about what God has done in Jesus Christ and what our fitting response should be), and prophetic (sound judgment and faithful and relevant witness).

105. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 244–47.

chapter, the heart of biblical wisdom is living one's life as an ongoing conversation with God and thinking about all things rationally in relation to God and in obedience to God.

4.   Concluding summary

This chapter depicted the human person as a rational creature, whom God creates, restores, and transforms to participate in the divine *Logos* and thus to share in the wisdom of God. This view of the human person suggests at least four general implications for Christian ethics. First, Christian ethics is informed by faith seeking understanding. It prioritizes both knowing God and understanding God's created world, with the intention of seeking to comprehend, teach, pursue and enact God's purposes in and for the world. Second, Christian ethics affirms the life of the mind. This reflects God's creative intent that human beings delight in discovering and participating in God's designs for the natural world. Understanding God's created world in a comprehensively coherent way requires that Christians engage not only religious studies and theology, but also the sciences, the social sciences, the arts, and the humanities (see chapter 7). Affirming and cultivating the life of the mind reflects God's ethical intent that human beings not merely conform to rules or submit to authorities and traditions, but become the kind of people who can "test and discern" God's will because they have a renewed mind and a renovated character. Third, as important as affirming the life of the mind is, Christian ethics also affirms that human beings are more than their minds. Human beings are *whole persons*. Cultivating and shaping the mind is just one aspect of holistic character formation, which also includes fostering virtues and shaping passions, loyalties, perceptions, practical reasoning (or *phronesis*), and the basic convictions that make up one's worldview.[106]

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106. See Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 59–61. See also chapter 7 of this dissertation for a more detailed discussion of worldview formation.

Finally, Christian ethics seeks to be rooted in Scripture, illuminated and empowered by the Holy Spirit, in dialogue with tradition, and coherently synthesized by reason. This approach acknowledges and promotes the authority of Scripture for Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy, but also underscores the dynamic interplay of accessing the Scriptures *with* minds renewed by the Spirit and *supported by* the human quest for truth, including the wisdom of other believers both past and present (i.e. ecclesial traditions, biblical scholars, theologians, pastors and church leaders).[107] It also highlights the primary purpose of engaging Scripture, namely to grow in our love and knowledge of God, which then orients our thoughts, prioritizes, commitments, and responsibilities with respect to God, other human beings, and the natural world.

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107. The early church fathers are particularly important (and by extension, the great theologians throughout the history of the church who write in continuity with that early tradition), not only because of their temporal proximity to the biblical authors, but also because of the nature of the early Christian witness and the development of the canon. Previous to the finalization of the canon, the early fathers (e.g., Irenaeus) appealed to the threefold authority of Scripture, tradition (the *catholic*, orthodox church), and authority (vested in the office of bishops who traced their theology to the witness of the apostles and the churches established by the apostles). Once the canon was finalized (367 AD) theologians could appeal to Scripture as the final authority for theological reflection and doctrinal formulation. Canonization was important in that it preserved and protected the combined witness of the early church, in continuity with the Old Testament people of God (incidentally, the OT itself developed in such a way that combined earlier revelation with the ongoing rabbinical and scribal traditions, which redacted and copied the canonical sources). As Ron Highfield describes it, canonization was the process of concentrating the church's sources of authority (Scripture, tradition, office) into a single focus (the finalized canon). Thus, henceforth, the historic Christian theological Tradition became an ongoing conversation (involving reason, experience of the Spirit, and the ongoing development of particular ecclesial traditions) about the meaning and implications of Scripture for the knowledge of God and for the life and mission of the church. As Vanhoozer puts it, the great Christian Tradition now consists of faithful performances (or faithful improvisations) of the authoritative Script of God's *Theo-Drama* instantiated in particular and contextual ecclesial traditions (*Drama of Doctrine*, 152). On this overall development, see Ron Highfield, *Great is the Lord. Theology for the Praise of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 20–24.

Chapter 5:
The Human Person as an Eschatological Creature

A.   Introduction

So far, we have observed that human beings are relational creatures because God invites them to participate in the divine *communion* of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by drawing them to share in the ecstatic love of the Trinity. They are also rational creatures, because God invites them to participate in the intelligible *conversation* of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit by drawing them to share in the wisdom and *Logos* of God. In this chapter we will explore the idea that human beings are eschatological creatures, invited to participate in the divine *commission* or vocation by sharing in the reign of God (which is already experienced but not yet fully and universally acknowledged). Theologically and ethically, this perspective highlights the importance of *hope* for a trinitarian theological anthropology and emphasizes the aspect of human purpose and destiny that concerns serving as God's stewards and representatives by sustaining, restoring, and improving creation in faithful partnership with God. The chapter begins with a discussion of the human being as called by the Father for a purpose and mission, followed by a discussion of the destructive implications of human corruption for that purpose and mission. It then describes restoration in Christ and transformation by the Spirit in the context of saving human beings from a purposeless and self-destructive destiny (due to corruption) and thereby renewing and realigning them in their calling to serve God's purposes. Finally, it explores the role of hope in the eschatological dimension of Christian ethics within the context of the new creation and the vocation to serve the kingdom of God in the power of the Spirit. It concludes with some general implications for sustaining, restoring, and improving the world as steward-priests of the new creation.

B.   Called by the Father for a purpose and mission

1.   Creation, *imago Dei*, and calling

Created to advance and develop over time

Human beings are creatures of change. Whatever we believe about the origins and development of primitive human beings, it is clear that they have in many ways advanced over time. They have accumulated knowledge, developed artistry and craftsmanship, travelled and explored the world, and built cultures and civilizations. Since the advent of modern science, they have greatly augmented their understanding of the natural world and achieved rapid technological innovation, with ripple effects leading to previously unfathomable advances in health and medicine, media and communications, global travel and trade, and the widespread accessibility of information through the Internet. Of course, not all development has been positive. As sinful creatures, human beings also have employed their technological skills and knowledge to devise ever new and innovative ways of deceiving, cheating, controlling, enslaving, and killing each other. Thus, the ongoing development of scientific knowledge and technological proficiency continually gives rise to new ethical questions and concerns that previous generations of humans did not have to face. Nevertheless, change and advancement are inherent features of human existence. Every established culture or tradition has to negotiate change in order to survive, even while trying to maintain faithfulness to its treasured history and values. For Christians, this means *faithfully* translating and adapting the ancient apostolic faith for present conditions and contexts.

The negotiation of change often leads to conflict and disagreement, because for most people change is threatening and difficult even when it is mostly positive (and all

change involves a degree of risk and ambiguity concerning outcome and implications).

Many people throughout history have pondered and debated whether or not change is

desirable (by 'change' I mean progressive advancement, since presumably most agree

that regression should be avoided). Those who answer negatively tend to be somewhat

suspicious or cynical about advances in science, technology, civilization, and culture,

while those who answer affirmatively tend to be more optimistic about the potential of

such advances to enhance the quality of human life. Christian theologians have long

debated whether development was part of God's original creative intent for humanity.

One influential view, often attributed to Augustine and the 'Western' theological

tradition, maintains that human beings were created in a state of original righteousness,

maturity, and perfection.[1] It should be noted that while Augustine generally supports the

original righteousness and perfection view, he also depicts creation as being analogous to

a seed that God planted to grow and develop over time.[2] Some proponents of the ideal

origins view argue that redemption involves restoring human beings to their original state

of perfection, which they forfeited wholly or in part through the Fall (Gen 3). More

persuasive is the alternate view of Irenaeus and Athanasius that God created human

beings not in a state of full maturity and perfection in which they would remain static, but

in a state of infancy in which they would advance and develop over time.[3] As James

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1. Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 177–78.

2. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 5.23.44, trans. Edmund Hill, ed. John E. Rotelle, vol. 13 *The Works of St. Augustine* (New York: New City, 2002), 299.

3. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV/11.1–2; 38.1–4; V/8, 10, 15, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). See also: Julie Canlis, "Being Made Human: the Significance of Creation for Irenaeus' Doctrine of Participation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58, no. 4 (2005): 434–54; James C. Peterson, *Changing Human Nature: Ecology, Ethics, Genes, and God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 6, 25, 127, 171; Matthew C. Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation: The Cosmic Christ and the Saga of Redemption* (Boston: Brill, 2008); and F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming*

Peterson reflects, "For Irenaeus, humanity is declared good from the start, but not

complete. Part of what it means to be human for individuals and humanity is to grow over

time at every level of human life."[4] Athanasius argues similarly when he says that human

beings were created "by nature corruptible, but destined, by grace following from

partaking in the Word, to have escaped their natural state, had they remained good."[5] The

implication of this is that the advancement of human knowledge, culture, and

productivity are part of God's creative intent for human beings. As J. Richard Middleton

argues,

> The Bible itself portrays the move from creation to eschaton as movement from a
> garden (in Genesis 2) to a city (in Revelation 21–22). Redemption does not
> reverse, but rather embraces, historical development. The transformation of the
> initial state of the earth into complex human societies is not part of the fall, but
> rather the legitimate creational mandate of humanity. Creation was never meant
> to be static, but was intended by God from the beginning to be developmental,
> moving toward a goal.[6]

Correspondingly, Irenaeus argues that Jesus Christ, the prototypical human being,

became incarnate *as an infant* in order to recapitulate genuine human existence and so to

take all of sinful humanity into himself and direct it toward maturity and fulfilment.[7] In

an Irenaean developmental view, human redemption involves not simply restoring human

beings to a prelapsarian state of original perfection, but redeeming them in Christ and

thereby restoring them to a right relationship with God, and then transforming and

directing them toward a future destiny of maturity and glory. Thus, the Incarnation

inaugurates God's final goal for mature humanity. In support of Irenaeus's view,

Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003),
235–42.

    4.   Peterson, *Changing Human Nature*, 8.

    5.   Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 5.1, in *NPNF2–04. Athanasius· Select Works and
Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature, 1892), 38.

    6.   J. Richard Middleton, "A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Case for a Holistic Reading of the
Biblical Story of Redemption," *Journal for Christian Theological Research* 11 (2006): 76.

    7   Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* IV/38.2, 4.

Scripture records not only that Jesus was born as an infant in humble circumstances, but also that he *grew* in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and people (Luke 2:52). The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus "had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people." The author goes on to explain that "because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb 2:17–18). And the apostle Paul writes, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). From a biblical point of view, neither creation nor redemption is a static state. Rather, both creation and redemption reflect God's eschatological purposes of directing human beings toward their *telos* as dynamic and developing creatures, gradually being transformed into the image of Christ.

In addition to its resonance with Scripture, Irenaeus's dynamic view of the human person fits well with modern scientific discoveries about human personhood and development, especially in anthropology and biology. First, as Pannenberg and others have observed, human beings are inherently exocentric creatures that define their identity in ongoing dialogical openness and receptivity to the world around them.[8] In chapter 3, we employed this observation to argue that human beings are inherently relational creatures; we now observe that their exocentricity also implies that they are inherently future-oriented, present-transcending creatures that continually discover new possibilities

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8. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999). J. Wentzel Van Huyssteen notes the Pannenberg's notion of exocentricity or human self-transcendence "summarizes a broad consensus among contemporary anthropologies." See Huyssteen, *Alone in the World? Human Uniqueness in Science and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 140.

for their existence in the world.[9] Second, Irenaeus's view fits with modern insights about

the brain's role in 'hard wiring' moral development, thus linking morality with our

concrete biological embodiment. This has important implications for Christian spirituality

and character formation.[10] Third, Irenaeus's view resonates with contemporary scientific

views that promote a holistic, non-reductive understanding of human biological existence

(e.g., body *and* soul, brain *and* mind, instinctual doing *and* consciousness of being, etc.)

with the aid of such notions as complexity theory, emergence, supervenience, and top-

down causation.[11] Fourth, an Irenaean view is compatible with modern evolutionary

theory concerning human origins and development (but does not necessarily require it)

and lends support to synthetic, interdisciplinary theological frameworks, such as theistic

evolution, evolutionary creation, or biologos.[12]

Imago Dei as commission and task

In the previous two chapters we observed the relational and rational aspects of

being made in God's image. Presently, we will consider the eschatological character of

the *imago Dei*, which associates the image of God in human beings with their purpose

9.   Philip Hefner (in dialogue with Pannenberg) similarly writes, "To be a person is not fully contained in our physic-biological behavior but rather also requires the marshalling of that behavior in response to the demand from our world to actualize our authentic possibilities within it." Hefner, "Imago Dei: The Possibility and Necessity of the Human Person," in *The Human Person in Science and Theology*, ed. Niels Henrik Gregersen, Willem B. Dress, and Ulf Görman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 86.

10.   See Paul N. Markham, *Rewired. Exploring Religious Conversion* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2007). For a summary, see my review of Markham's book in *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 60 (December 2008): 274–75.

11.   Niels Henrik Gregersen, "God's Public Traffic: Holist Versus Physicalist Supervenience," in *The Human Person in Science and Theology*, ed. Niels Henrik Gregersen, Willem B. Dress, and Ulf Görman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 153–88; Markham, *Rewired*, 103–21; Heffner, "Imago," 73–94.

12.   'Evolutionary Creation' is the term Denis Lamoureux uses to describe his position. See Denis O. Lamoureux, *Evolutionary Creation. A Christian Approach to Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008). Francis Collins uses the term 'biologos' to describe his own approach to integrating evolution with Christian theism. See Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press/Simon & Schuster, 2006); Peterson, *Changing Human Nature*, 2–6; Huyssteen, *Alone in the World*, 139–58. The 'Biologos Forum' is the name of Collins's website that discusses the relationship between science and Christian faith (http://www.biologos.org/).

and calling to function as stewards of the earth and priests of creation, as well as with

their orientation toward their final transformation into the image of Christ by the Holy

Spirit. Many biblical commentators and theologians have pointed out that the declaration

in Genesis 1 that human beings are made in God's image occurs together with their given

mandate to rule over the earth.[13] Genesis 1:26 records: "Then God said, 'Let us make

human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea

and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the

creatures that move along the ground.'" Moreover, Genesis 2:15 describes the human

task as working and protecting the garden and Psalm 8:3–8 says that God made human

beings to be rulers over God's created works. In light of such texts, Middleton asserts that

"the fundamental human task is conceived as the responsible exercise of power on God's

behalf over the non-human world."[14] Middleton explains that in the ancient Near Eastern

culture, ruling over the earth had to do primarily with the development of agriculture and

animal husbandry (the basis of human societal organization), but also included by

extension the advancement of culture, technology, and civilization.[15] As Middleton's

statement suggests, human dominion does not involve free license to dominate creation

by exploiting or abusing the earth or other creatures, but is limited by two qualifications.

First, human beings are to exercise their dominion in responsibility before God, because

creation is first and foremost *God's* creation and humans are accountable to God in their

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13.   Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 196–97 and *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 174, 177–78: J. Richard Middleton, "A New Heaven and a New Earth," 80–81 and *The liberating Image: the Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005).

14.   Middleton, "A New Heaven and a New Earth," 81. Similarly, Dallas Willard writes: "In creating human beings God made them to rule, to reign, to have dominion in a limited sphere. Only so can they be persons." Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 21.

15.   Middleton, "A New Heaven and a New Earth," 81.

role within it. Second, human beings are not given absolute rule but exercise their dominion on God's behalf. This means that their ruling must faithfully represent God's purposes and goals for creation. Human rule of the earth thus amounts not to sovereign kingship but faithful stewardship. Human beings are God's representatives and vice regents, appointed to rule God's creation according to God's prerogatives. A third qualification, not mentioned by Middleton, is that genuine human dominion is eschatologically conditioned. Faithful stewardship means not only exercising dominion on God's behalf, but also confidently and joyfully anticipating the final return of the King (Rev 11:15).

The idea that reflecting God's image includes faithful stewardship gains further support by Scripture's portrayal of the universe as God's palace-temple, in which God places human beings and commissions them to be steward-priests. One important representative text is Isaiah 66:1: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be?"[16] Reflecting on this text, Rikki E. Watts asks, "Where does one find a throne and a footstool if not in a palace, and what is the palace of Yahweh if not a temple?"[17] In his article, Watts provides a fascinating comparison of several key details in Genesis 1 with other Ancient Near

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16. In addition to this text, John Walton observes that 1 Kings 8:28 and Isa 6:3 (cf. Exod 40:34) also depict the cosmos as a temple. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One. Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 84.

17. Rikki E. Watts, "Making Sense of Genesis 1," paragraph 47, online article for the American Scientific Affiliation: http://www.asa3.org/ASA/topics/Bible-Science/6.02Watts.html; also published as "On the Edge of the Millennium: Making Sense of Genesis 1" in *Living in the LambLight· Christianity and Contemporary Challenges to the Gospel*, ed. Hans Boersma (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2001), 129–51. Watts also notes that the Old Testament is full of architectural imagery in its description of creation, speaking for example of the foundations of the earth, the pillars of the earth and of the heavens, the heavens' windows, the stretching out of the heavens like a canopy or tent, and containing storehouses (paragraph 46). See also Rikk E. Watts, "The New Exodus/New Creational Restoration of the Image of God: A Biblical-Theological Perspective on Salvation," in *What Does it Mean to be Saved? Broadening Evangelical Horizons of Salvation*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 15–41.

Eastern creation accounts, identifying both striking similarities and significant differences.[18] He suggests that the depiction of creation as a palace-temple is unsurprising when one considers the contextual realities of the ancient world as well as the ancient belief that the actions of kings paralleled the cosmic activity of the gods. He explains that the greatest threat to ancient, settled agricultural existence was chaos resulting from wars, lawlessness, or flooding. In such ancient societies it was the king who defeated enemies and provided protection, who upheld the law, and who supervised the construction of barriers to restrain the floods. Moreover, upon establishing his kingdom and entering into victorious rest, the king would build a palace for himself and a temple for his nation's deity. This pattern resembles the Genesis account of God differentiating, restraining, and ordering creation to function as God's palace and temple, in which God comes to dwell and rule on the day of Sabbath rest.[19] Watts finds additional support for the palace-temple depiction of creation in the forming of humanity in the image of God. In the Ancient Near East, the last thing placed within a temple was the image of the deity, who was then invoked to indwell the temple as a resting place and authority centre.[20] Similarly, in Genesis 1 God forms the human being in God's own image as the culminating act of creation and then (in Gen 2) breathes the divine Spirit into the human creature to invoke

18.   Watts clarifies that his point is not that Genesis 1 is identical with other Ancient Near Eastern accounts, or even that Genesis borrows from them (which is possible, but not necessary to assume). Rather, he is "simply interested in trying to understand what issues a second-millennium B.C. culture might have been interested in" ("Making Sense of Genesis One," paragraph 17). John Walton makes a similar point in his rereading of the Genesis text in light of Ancient Near Eastern literature: "I am not suggesting that the Israelites are borrowing from these ancient literatures. Instead the literatures show how people thought in the ancient world, and as we examine Genesis, we can see that Israelites thought in similar ways." Walton, *The Lost World*, 79.

19.   See also Walton's comments about the meaning of the seventh day Sabbath rest in relation to the cosmos as God's temple. Walton, *The Lost World*, 72–92.

20.   Walton notes that the purpose of a temple in the ancient world was not primarily to be a place where people gathered for worship (like modern churches), but rather a "home" and "headquarters" or "control room" for the deity. (*The Lost World*, 75).

life and call it into blessing (Sabbath rest) and dominion. Of course, there are also important differences between the Genesis account and other Ancient Near Eastern myths. For instance, the idea that human beings bear the divine image appears only in Genesis 1 and in some Egyptian texts.[21] However, in Egyptian literature only a single individual acts as the god's ruling representative—specifically the king. Moreover, ancient kings frequently placed images of themselves throughout their territories to symbolize their power and sovereignty.[22] In contrast, Genesis teaches that all human beings are intended to reflect God's image and consequently to serve equally as God's stewards or vice regents over creation.[23] Thus, as Stanley Grenz points out, the Genesis narrative served as a critique of Ancient Near Eastern theology and ideology by universalizing the divine image and thereby safeguarding the dignity and equality of every human being.[24] The ethical implication of this, as Watts strongly puts it, is that "any act of abuse against another human being is an act of high treason against the God whose image we bear and to whose kingship and sovereignty we therefore inherently bear witness."[25]

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21. Watts writes, "Unlike the Babylonian traditions, the Egyptians grant a special role to humans. According to the Great Hymn to Atum, the god 'created mankind and distinguished their nature and made their life.' We also find the making of man from clay with either Khnum being seen as a potter molding humanity on his wheel (Great Hymn to Khnum) or Ptah molding humanity with his hands. In the Instruction of Amenemope, 'Man is clay and straw, and God is his potter' and in a few texts there is even the idea that humanity is made in the image of the god, as per the Instruction of King Merikare: 'They are his [Re] own images proceeding from his flesh.' The Egyptian word used here (*snnw*) is often written with a determinative in the shape of a statue. This is similar to Genesis 1's notion of humanity being made from the dust of the earth in Elohim's image (*tselem*), a word which initially meant a piece cut from an object and which would be entirely appropriate for a piece of clay cut for a sculpture." Watts, "Making Sense of Genesis 1," paragraph 30.

22. Watts, "Making Sense of Genesis 1," paragraph 49.

23. Watts, "Making Sense of Genesis 1," paragraph 36.

24. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 200–2. Grenz notes that the Genesis account also contradicts the wide-spread ancient belief that human beings were created to be slaves of the gods.

25. Watts, "Making Sense of Genesis 1," paragraph 55.

In his recent book *The Lost World of Genesis One*, John Walton lends further

support to the idea that Scripture depicts creation as God's palace-temple and human

beings as Gods steward-priests. Walton convincingly argues that Genesis 1 should be

interpreted not as an account of the material origins of creation, but as an account of God

establishing creation's proper functioning and purpose. His argument progresses through

several propositions. First, Genesis 1 is representative of ancient cosmology. Second,

ancient cosmology operates with a functional ontology and thus is function-oriented. In a

functional ontology, something is thought to exist not because of its material properties

(as in a modern materialist ontology) but because it has a function in an ordered social

and cultural system. Within such a perspective, to create something is not merely to give

it material substance; the actual creative act consists in assigning it a functioning role.[26]

To exist, therefore, is to have a function. As Walton puts it, "cosmic creation in the

ancient world was not viewed primarily as a process by which matter was brought into

being, but as a process by which functions, roles, order, jurisdiction, organization and

stability were established."[27] Third, the Hebrew word for "create" (*bārā'*) used in Genesis

1 concerns function and the word for "beginning" (*rēšît*) refers to a period of time rather

than a single point in time. Accordingly, Walton suggests that Gen 1:1 should be

rendered: "In the initial period, God created by assigning functions throughout the

heavens and the earth, and this is how he did it."[28] Fourth, Genesis 1 describes the

beginning state of creation as being non-functional. This is evident in its description of

the primal state in terms of functional nonexistence in its use of the words *tōhû* and *bōhû*

and by the presence of primal cosmic waters, which is the classic form that nonexistence

26. Walton, *The Lost World*, 26–27.
27. Walton, *The Lost World*, 53.
28. Walton, *The Lost World*, 38–46.

takes in the functionally oriented ancient world.[29] Moreover, from this perspective, God's

declaration "it is good" means that what has just been created (i.e., given function) is in

fact functioning properly. The repeated use of this phrase throughout the account leading

up to the culminating "it is very good" after the creation of human beings expresses the

functional readiness of creation for the arrival of humans.[30]

Walton's next three propositions (five through seven) concern the functional role

of the seven days of creation.[31] In the first three days God establishes *functions*. On day

one God declares "Let there be a period of light," separates the light from darkness,

calling the former 'day' and the latter 'night', and thereby creates time.[32] On day two

God separates cosmic space into waters below (sea) and a firmament above, which is a

solid canopy-like structure to restrain the upper cosmic waters.[33] Day two thus concerns

the functional creation of weather. On day three, God separates the terrestrial space (land

from seas) so that the land could begin to serve the function of producing food

(vegetation). So, in the first three days God establishes three great functions, which in the

ancient worldview jointly provided the foundation for life (i.e., time, weather, and

food).[34] These functions are reiterated in reverse order in Genesis 8:22, directly after the

great flood, as an act of recreation and renewed blessing: "As long as the earth endures,

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29.   Walton argues that the hermeneutical presuppositions of traditional interpreters led them to translate these words with conceptually material terms (e.g., "formless and void") rather than with functional terms. Walton, *The Lost World*, 47–49.

30.   Walton, *The Lost World*, 51.

31.   Walton, *The Lost World*, 55–71.

32.   Walton asks us to notice that this description is functional rather than material, as it makes no scientific sense to separate light from darkness or simply to call light (as such) "day."

33.   Walton argues that translating expanse/firmament with the word "sky" is inaccurate and misleading, being motivated not by the text but by concordist hermeneutics. Walton, *The Lost World*, 51 (for Walton's critique of concordism, see pp. 16–19).

34.   Walton, *The Lost World*, 59–60. Walton demonstrates that other Ancient Near Eastern texts also prioritized the importance of these three foundational functions.

seed time and harvest [food], cold and heat, summer and winter [weather], day and night [time] will never cease."

On days four through six of the creation narrative, God installs *functionaries*: the sun moon and stars on day four to separate day from night, mark the seasons, and provide light to the earth; living creatures of the seas and birds of the sky on day five to carry out their own function of increasing and multiplying to fill the waters and the earth; and wild animals, livestock, and ground creatures on day six to spread out across the land. Most importantly, on the sixth day God creates human beings in God's own image to fulfill a unique role. Human beings are to function not just in relation to their origin (land, sea, etc.) or their kind (the call to reproduce). They are to function in a multifaceted way in relation to the world (to rule over it), to God (as vice regents), and to each other as embodied persons (male and female).[35] Human beings are created to reflect the divine image partly by executing their god-like function of ruling over creation. Walton notes that at this point the Genesis account differs in perspective from other Ancient Near Eastern myths. While most of the ancient world viewed creation as serving the gods, in Genesis creation is established not for God's benefit but for humanity's benefit.[36] Finally, on day seven God "rests" from creative activity and thereby takes up residence in the cosmic palace-temple that is God's creation. Walton argues that the language of resting points unambiguously to a temple context. He writes, "Deity rests in a temple, and only in a temple." Consequently, "Without hesitation the ancient reader would conclude that

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35. Walton elsewhere notes that God's assertion that "it is not good for the man to be alone" in Genesis 2 is a functional judgment, meaning that the human condition without the woman was not yet functionally complete (*The Lost World*, 51).

36. Moreover, ancient accounts usually depicted people offering up all of creation to the gods, but in Genesis people represent God to the rest of creation (Walton, *The Lost World*, 67–69).

this is a temple text and that day seven is the most important of the seven days."[37]

According to Walton, the seventh day is most important because of the significance of divine temple rest. In the ancient world, a temple was constructed so that a deity could have a centre for its rule. The significance of day seven in the Genesis account, then, is that God comes to indwell creation and thus to fill and rule over it.[38] "In short, by naming the functions and installing the functionaries, and finally by deity entering his resting place, the temple comes into existence. . . ."[39] In light of Walton's analysis, Genesis 1 describes not the material origins of creation but the functional inauguration of creation, depicted in terms of the construction of God's cosmic palace-temple and the installation of human beings as God's steward-priests to rule and care for it. As we will explore later in this chapter, human beings fulfill their creative function and commission, and in this way reflect God's image, by sustaining, restoring, and improving creation in faithful partnership with God. Moreover, this commission has an eschatological dimension, because the task of sustaining, restoring, and improving creation is ongoing and leads toward a final fulfilment or *telos*, which is the new creation.

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37. Walton, *The Lost World*, 72. To illustrate the functionally operative yet incomplete state of creation at the end of the sixth day, Walton employs a business analogy: "In days four to six the functionaries are installed in their appropriate positions and given their appropriate roles . . . they are assigned their offices (cubicles), told to whom they will report, and thus given an idea of their place in the company. Their workday is determined by the clock, and they are expected to be productive. Foremen have been put in place, and the plant is now ready for operation. But before the company is ready to operate, the owner is going to arrive and move into his office" (p. 71).

38. Walton, *The Lost World*, 75. For additional support, Walton appeals to Psalm 132, which unites in one place the ideas of divine rest, temple, and enthronement. He writes, "God's 'ceasing' (*šābat*) on the seventh day in Genesis 2:2 leads to his 'rest' (*nûha*), associated with the seventh day in Exodus 20:11. His 'rest' is located in his 'resting place' (*měnûhâ*) in Psalm 132, which also identifies it as the temple from which he rules" (p. 74).

39. Walton, *The Lost World*, 89. Walton argues that the seven days of creation depict the inauguration of a cosmic temple. He compares this account with the inauguration of the tabernacle in Exodus 35–40. The construction of the tabernacle progresses from an initial material building phase in chapters 25–39 to a final inauguration/creation phase in chapter 40, at which point the glory of the Lord fills it.

2. Usurpation and the distortion of the commission

The reality of sin in the lives of human beings impacts their relationships (see chapter 3), their knowledge of God and understanding of God's purposes (see chapter 4), and their commission to be steward-priests of God's creation. Concerning the latter, in Genesis 3 we observe that the threefold function of human beings with respect to God, others, and the world is distorted by sin and the curse that sin carries with it. After Adam and Eve partake of the forbidden fruit, God pronounces judgement and describes the consequences of their disobedience. First, the fact that Adam and Eve have disobeyed God's explicit command out of their desire to be "like God" demonstrates the corruption of their role as God's representative vice regents. Sin has corrupted their hearts and led them to prioritize their own desires and plans over God's. Second, sin distorts the proper functioning of the relationship between Adam and Eve. According to God's original intent Adam and Eve would have functioned as equal co-rulers of creation (Gen 2), but due to the corrupting power of sin their relationship is now characterized by a mixture of pathological desire and a twisted will to rule over each other. Third, the human vocational function with respect to nature is disrupted. Genesis 3 depicts this disruption as impacting both the man and the woman; the woman experiences it in the form of pain during childbearing and the man experiences it in the form of toil and difficulty in working the earth. Moreover, this disruption of proper functioning (i.e., of God's intended order) leads to servitude—the woman to the man from whom she was formed and the man to the ground from which he was formed. God's original intent was for men and women faithfully to rule creation through their vocation and work, by caring for one another and for non-human creatures, by raising families, and by building cultures, societies, and

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civilizations. However, sin now disrupts this proper functional ordering of the cosmos and causes human beings to be *ruled by* creation rather than exercising appropriate dominion over it.[40]

We can explore the destructive impact of sin on human existence further by reflecting on the nature of sin as not just disobedience to God but, more insidiously, as rebellion against God. In his theological reading of Genesis 3, Bonhoeffer suggests that the placement of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil at the centre of the garden represents the centrality and authority of God's Word and command for genuine human existence.[41] It reflects God's intent that human beings be oriented toward God in openness, basic trust, and dependence. In the language of Pannenberg, God created human beings to be exocentric creatures that find their centre outside of themselves in God. As their defining centre, God is the ground of their identity and the source of their very life (Bonhoeffer notes that the tree of life is also at the centre of the garden). When Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit they transgress their boundary or limit as God's creatures and reject the sufficiency of God's Word and providence for their existence.[42] Bonhoeffer explains,

> Thus for their knowledge of God human beings renounce the word of God that approaches them again and again out of the inviolable center and boundary of life; they renounce the life that comes from this word and grab it for themselves. They themselves stand at the center. This is disobedience in the semblance of

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40. For example, with respect to vocation, people often experience this disruption as difficulty and failure at work or as obsession and unrestrained ambition.

41. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax, vol. 3, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 83–88.

42. Bonhoeffer writes that in sinfulness, the human being "now lives out of its own resources, creates its own life, is its own creator; it no longer needs the Creator, it has itself become creator, inasmuch as it creates its own life. Thereby its creatureliness is eliminated, destroyed. Adam is no longer a creature." Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 115.

> obedience, the desire to rule in the semblance of service, the will to be creator in the semblance of being a creature, being dead in the semblance of life.[43]

The serpent's claim that Adam and Eve would become "like God" by knowing good and evil is cunningly deceptive, because it introduces a subtle distortion of their calling to be stewards and co-rulers of creation. Indeed God did create Adam and Eve to reflect God's image, but in their twisted desire to be "like God" they transgressed their creaturely limit and attempted to usurp God's unique place as the centre and authority of their existence. Thus, the ultimate character of their action was malevolent and led to increasing degrees of corruption, disruption, and finally spiritual death (Gen 3–11). As Bonhoeffer reflects, "Humankind-sicut-deus ['like God'] is dead, for it has cut itself off from the tree of life; it lives out of its own resources, yet it cannot live. It is compelled to live, yet it cannot live. That is what death means."[44]

At least three consequences follow from the sinful attempt of human beings to usurp God's rightful place. First, we experience a threefold distortion of our identity and purpose. We forget that we were meant to be stewards of God's creation and instead enthrone ourselves as sovereign kings. Consequently, we begin to exploit the world and other human beings to serve our own purposes as we construct our own personal kingdoms. Moreover, we forget that we were meant to be priests of God's creation, and thus to represent God within the created world by shaping and guiding it to glorify God and serve God's purposes. Instead, we fall into an idolatrous quest for our own glory and honour. We begin to covet the praise and worship of other human beings and seek to influence others to serve us, sometimes even using religion as propaganda to justify and solidify our own place of honour and privilege (e.g., Jesus's critique of the religious

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43. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 117.
44. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 135.

leaders in Mark 12:38–40).[45] In addition, we forget that all of creation is God's palace-temple and is therefore sacred and intended to serve and glorify God. Instead, we divide up creation into spheres and create false dichotomies that separate religion/faith from everyday life (e.g., sacred–secular, inward–outward, or private–public). This restricts or confines our devotion and allegiance to God to certain fragments of our existence. As Bonhoeffer reflects, "The displacement of God from the world, and from the public part of human life, led to the attempt to keep his place secure at least in the sphere of the 'personal', the 'inner', and the 'private.'"[46] Perhaps this tendency is most acute in the modern age, though impurity of heart is a perennial temptation. Against this tendency,

> The Bible does not recognize our distinction between the outward and the inward. Why should it? It is always concerned with *anthrōpos teleios*, the *whole* man, even where, as in the Sermon on the Mount, the decalogue is pressed home to refer to 'inward disposition.' That a good 'disposition' can take the place of total goodness is quite unbiblical.[47]

Human beings are meant to serve and glorify God holistically and comprehensively, living their whole lives with consistency and integrity before God as steward-priests of God's palace-temple creation. The sinful tendency to displace God from the centre of our lives to the periphery thoroughly distorts our intended identity and purpose.

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45. Marx and Nietzsche perceived this often present aspect of religion clearly, even if myopically and one-sidedly. For a Christian critique of this kind of religion, see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," in *Berlin 1921–33*, vol. 12 *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Larry L. Rasmussen, trans. Isabel Best and David Higgins (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 300–10 and Ralf K. Wüstenberg, *A Theology of Life: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Religionless Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

46. Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 344. Elsewhere Bonhoeffer writes that the division of the world into such spheres fallaciously assumes there are realities which lie outside the reality of Christ. This creates a possibility of living one's life in either: (a) a spiritual existence which has no part in secular existence; or (b) a secular existence which can claim autonomy for itself and exercise this right of autonomy in its dealings with the spiritual sphere. See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*. vol. 6 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss. Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 47–75.

47. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*. 346 (emphasis original).

Second, in place of locating our identity and purpose outside of ourselves in God, we pursue a self-constructed identity and a self-directed destiny. We become literally dis-oriented, because we are alienated from our Creator, who is our true source and centre of meaning. Consequently, we fall prey to anxiety as we attempt desperately to make something of ourselves or, alternately, to despair in our failure to achieve our goals or meet the expectations of others. Moreover, in our disorientation we are oblivious to God's eschatological purposes and plans for us. Lacking a genuine and compelling vision of God's future, we ascribe infinite and eternal value to what is finite and temporary. Alienated from God's liberating Spirit, who brings God's eschatological future into the present and directs us to our true destiny, we become closed-off, ruled, and enslaved by the tyranny of our own past and present.

Third, rebellion from God leads us into a downward spiral of meaninglessness, purposelessness, and ultimately nonexistence. Bonhoeffer vividly describes the effects of human sinful rebellion as follows:

> As such a defection it is a *continual* fall, a *plunging down* into a bottomless abyss, a state of being let go, a process of moving further and further away, falling deeper and deeper. And in all this it is not merely a *moral lapse* but the destruction of creation by the creature. The extent of the fall is such that it affects the whole created world.[48]

Bonhoeffer's description receives support from John Walton's observations concerning the effects of sin as portrayed by the flood account in Genesis 6–8. At the beginning of Genesis God separated and restrained the ominous cosmic waters, which in the functional ontology of the ancient world represented purposelessness and nonexistence. Throughout the unfolding creation account, God brings increasing differentiation, purpose, and order

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48. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 120. Stanley Grenz describes sin in terms of a struggle of cosmic forces (*Theology*, 210).

to creation, culminating with the creation of human beings and the indwelling of God's

own presence and glory in creation (God's Sabbath palace-temple rest). After the

entrance of sin the proper functioning of creation is disrupted and the world, particularly

human life and society, gradually regress into disorder, chaos, wickedness, violence, and

destruction. Whereas initially God was pleased with creation and declared that "it is

good" (i.e., it is functioning properly), now God is grieved by the dysfunctional and

corrupt state of creation and even regrets having made human beings (Gen 6:6). So God

decides to send a great flood to cover the earth and destroy all living things, including

human beings with the exception of Noah and his family (Gen 6:11–22). Walton

describes the flood in relation to God's creational purposes as follows: "In Genesis, after

the cosmos is ordered, a crisis leads God to return the cosmos to an unordered,

nonfunctional state by means of a flood. Here the cosmic waters are let loose from their

boundaries and again the earth becomes non-functional."[49] Thus, the pattern Walton

identifies is that sin is a disruption God's intended purposes for creation and as such

incurs God's judgment and leads toward the degenerative undoing of creation. In the

New Testament, the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans likewise describes the

downward spiral of human sin and evil (1:18–32). Paul says that God gave human beings

over to suffer the consequences of their dysfunctional, rebellious, and destructive

behaviours and describes their resulting existence as a kind of living death (in 7:5 Paul

says that they bear the fruit of death) leading ultimately to spiritual death (Rom 5:12–14;

see also Jas 1:13-15 and Gal 6:8). Instead of enjoying the dignity, honour, and

satisfaction of their intended vocation as steward-priests to rule and care for creation,

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49.   Walton, *The Lost World*, 60.

human beings become slaves to sin (John 8:34; Rom 6:23; Gen 4:7) and are conformed to

the sinful patterns of this world (Rom 12:2).

C.   Saved from a purposeless and self-destructive destiny

1.   Recreated in the image of Christ

As mentioned earlier, Irenaeus argued that the creation of human beings in the

image of God points not to a static quality or possession but to a dynamic reality toward

which they are moving. This image was present in human beings at creation in embryonic

form as a promise of what would later be realized more fully through their union with

Christ in the Spirit. It would reach full maturity only at the final resurrection and

therefore is ultimately an eschatological reality.[50] Irenaeus writes,

> [T]he Word of God was made man, assimilating Himself to man, and man to
> Himself, so that by means of his resemblance to the Son, man might become
> precious to the Father. For in times long past, it was *said* that man was created
> after the image of God, but it was not [actually] *shown*; for the Word was as yet
> invisible, after whose image man was created, Wherefore also he did easily lose
> the similitude. When, however, the Word of God became flesh, He confirmed
> both these: for He both showed forth the image truly, since He became Himself
> what was His image; and He re-established the similitude after a sure manner, by
> assimilating man to the invisible Father through means of the visible Word.[51]

Irenaeus links the recreation of sinful human beings in the image of Christ to Christ's

redemptive work of recapitulation, whereby Christ assimilated or "took up [humanity]

into himself" and thereby restored human beings by means of his Incarnation, life, death,

Resurrection, and Ascension.[52] Jesus Christ came to "recapitulate" human existence—

being born as an infant, growing into adulthood, and then dying a human death—in order

to live the truly genuine and faithful human life that sinful men and women had failed to

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50.   Grenz, *Theology*, 172–73; *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 147–48, 177.
51.   Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V/16.2 (p. 544).
52.   Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* III/16.6 (pp. 442–43).

live.[53] By means of his redemptive work, Christ defeated the work of evil one, suffered

our fate, and rescued us from a destiny of purposelessness and destruction.[54] In addition,

he incorporated us into his own life of faithfulness before the Father, demonstrated how

we ought now to live as creatures renewed in his image, and pointed the way forward to

our eschatological future as mature image bearers. He has therefore given us a renewed

purpose and destiny.[55] As Eric Flett reflects, "That human beings are created in the image

of God means that they are christologically determined and oriented towards the future,

where the consummation of that determination lies."[56]

The New Testament explicitly teaches that Jesus Christ is uniquely and pre-

eminently the image of God (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15). Because Jesus Christ uniquely, truly,

and fully reflects God's image, he is therefore the prototypical human being who teaches

and demonstrates what it means to be authentically human.[57] As Stanley Grenz says, "In

his risen glory, Jesus Christ now radiates the fullness of humanness that constitutes God's

design for humankind from the beginning."[58] Accordingly, he is the "firstborn among

many brothers and sisters," the "firstborn of all creation," and the "firstborn from among

53. For Irenaeus's many comments about recapitulation, see *Against Heresies* II/22.4; III/16.6, 21.10, 23.1; V/12.4, 14.1, 19.1, 21.1.

54. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V/21.1 (p. 548).

55. Shults writes: "What is most true about human nature is not its primordial past but its eschatological future, an arriving determination that addresses us and calls us to spiritual union with God in Christ" (*Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 242).

56. Eric G. Flett, "Priests of Creation, Mediators of Order: the Human Person as a Cultural Being in Thomas F. Torrance's Theological Anthropology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58, no. 2 (2005): 175.

57. Hauerwas argues that we should not equate being a Christian with being human. He writes, "Such a position is bound to use Christ to underwrite the integrity of the 'natural,' since he is seen as epitomizing the fulfillment of the human vocation . . . this seems to be very bad advice – as Mark Twain observed, the worst advice you can give anyone is to be himself. . . ." Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983). But Hauerwas is here assuming a static or essentialist anthropology, in which case his criticism is correct. If, however, we are speaking of human beings not in essentialist terms but in eschatological terms of "new humanity in Christ by the Spirit," Hauerwas's criticism does not apply.

58. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 231.

the dead" (Rom 8:29; Col 1:15, 18). Moreover, Jesus Christ is the one in whose image all

redeemed human beings are destined to be conformed. As Paul writes, "For those God

foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29).

Grenz rightly observes that this verse does not concern speculation about the status of

one's personal faith and election, but is rather a powerful affirmation of God's plan for

humanity in the new creation. The sense of the verse, therefore, is that "believers *will*

indeed be brought into conformity to the Son, in union with whom they, in fact, already

live through the Spirit."[59] While our former sinful disposition reflected the image of

Adam (representing sinful humanity), our redemption means that we will reflect the

image of the Risen Christ who is the true human being.[60]

2.   Reoriented and realigned to serve Christ our Lord and King as his steward-priests

        Being recreated to reflect the image of the Risen Christ in the power of the Spirit

involves being reoriented and realigned to serve Christ as Lord and King. This is not just

a personal matter of one's private faith, but involves an allegiance to Christ that claims all

of one's existence in the world. As Bonhoeffer asserts, "Jesus claims for himself and the

Kingdom of God the whole of human life in all its manifestations."[61] Moreover, "In

Christ we are invited to participate in the reality of God and the reality of the world at the

same time, the one not without the other."[62] Jesus Christ is the Lord of all reality, and in

Christ all the scattered pieces of our fragmented and conflicted lives are reconciled,

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59.   Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 227 (emphasis added).

60.   As Paul writes, "And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man [Adam], so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man [Christ]" (1 Cor 15:49).

61.   Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 342.

62.   Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 55. Bonhoeffer continues, "What matters is *participating in the reality of God and the world in Jesus Christ today*, and doing so in such a way that I never experience the reality of God without the reality of the world, nor the reality of the world without the reality of God" (emphasis original).

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united together, and reoriented as we strive to seek first Christ's kingdom (Matt 6:33) with pure hearts (Matt 5:8; 6:21) and a clear and focused vision (Matt 6:22–23). As we seek him earnestly in the power of the Spirit, Christ teaches us and realigns our values and priorities. He gives all that we are, have, and do new meaning and direction. Our relationships, our work, our passions and dreams, our finances and resources, our plans and agendas are all redirected to serve Christ and his kingdom. All of this occurs not merely by our own strength, power, or ingenuity, but by the Spirit's work of drawing us (along with our gifts and abilities) into the kingly and priestly ministry of Jesus Christ himself, who by the same Spirit works in us and through us.[63]

Consequently, God's original intention that we be steward-priests of God's palace-temple creation is reaffirmed, but with renewed gratitude, focus, hope, and power, because of our union with Christ by the Spirit and our glorious eschatological destiny. In Christ, we are a "chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession" so that we "may declare the praises of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet 2:9).[64] With his shed blood, Jesus Christ the Lamb of God has purchased for God "members from every tribe and language and people and nation" and "made them to be a kingdom of priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (Rev 5:9–10). As steward-priests of God's new creation, redeemed human beings work toward and eagerly anticipate the final transformation of creation into God's eschatological cosmic city-palace-temple, the New Jerusalem (Rev 21), at which point

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63. As Paul declares, "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil 2:13).

64. Middleton notes that this verse serves as a continuation of the Abrahamic calling of God's people to mediate God's blessing to the world. Middleton, "A New Heaven and a New Earth," 85.

God will come to dwell fully with human beings and rule in eternal justice, truth, and

peace.[65]

3.   Transformation by the Spirit into the likeness of the Son

In chapter three we explored the Spirit's ministry in drawing human beings into

ever fuller, holistic, and abundant communion with God and others (section D.3). In

Chapter four we observed the Spirit's role in redeeming human beings from the captivity

of their minds and leading them to cultivate wisdom by enabling access to the mind of

Christ (section B.4). Presently we will briefly consider the Spirit's role in renewing and

transforming human beings to be Christ's eschatological steward-priests. The Apostle

Paul argues that our gradual conformity to the image of Christ is achieved not simply by

human effort, but is made possible by the transformative and empowering work of the

Spirit. For example, to the Corinthians he writes, "And all of us, with unveiled faces,

seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into

the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the

Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18). Scripture teaches that the transformation of the believer is already

underway, even though it is not yet complete, because the Spirit of the new age has

already broken into the old. The Spirit is a down payment or 'seal' of the glory to come

(2 Cor 1:22; 5:4; Eph 1:13–14). Moreover, the Spirit is the first instalment of the

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65.   Rikki Watts observes several features identifying the New Jerusalem as God's eschatological temple: "One striking feature is the absence of any Temple (Rev 21:22). The odd cube shape of the city might explain this. The only other biblical objects in a similar setting that are cube-shaped are the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle (10 cubits, probably) and Solomon's temple (20 cubits; 1 Kgs 6:20; 2 Chr 3:8; cf. the Holy Place in Ezekiel's temple, 500 cubits square, Ezek 42:16-20; 45:2). If so, then this suggests that the reason there is no temple in the New Jerusalem is because the city itself has become, not just the Temple, but the very Holy of Holies (cf. also Ezek 45:2-3). But what about the surprising size of the city: 12,000 stadia (approximately 1,500 miles) along each axis? The significance of these dimensions might lie in the observation that the size of the city corresponds to that of the then-known Greek world, while the height emphasizes the co-mingling of heaven and earth. In other words, the climax of the new creation is not the abandonment of the earth, but instead the coming of Yahweh himself to the earth to dwell among us." Watts, "Making Sense of Genesis 1," paragraph 48.

believer's inheritance in the kingdom of God (Rom 8:15–17; 14:17; 1 Cor 6:9–11; Gal 4:6–7). In addition, the New Testament indicates that we should expect a moral transformation when the Spirit of holiness comes into a person's life (Rom 8:1ff; 1 Cor 6:9–11; Gal 5:16ff). Accordingly, it encourages us to live in the power of the Spirit, to walk in the Spirit, and to be led by the Spirit in all we think, say, and do (Rom 8:4–6, 14; Gal 5:16, 18, 25). Jesus himself was totally dependent upon the Spirit's power and guidance for his own calling and ministry as the Lord, Messiah, and founder of God's eschatological kingdom. Jesus possessed the Holy Spirit without measure (John 3:34) and lived his entire life immersed in the Spirit's presence. The Spirit effected his birth (Matt 1:18-25; Luke 1:35), anointed him at his baptism (Matt 3:16-17; Mark 1:10-11; Luke 3:22; John 1:33), led him into the desert to face temptation (Matt 4:1; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1), and inspired his mission of proclaiming good news to the poor, proclaiming freedom for the prisoners, and recovering sight for the blind, setting the oppressed free, and proclaiming the year of the Lord's favour—the eschatological dawning of the kingdom (Luke 4:16–20). By the Spirit, Jesus accomplished his ministry of healing, teaching, confronting, reconciling, and even raising people from the dead. Indeed, by the Spirit's power Jesus himself was raised from the dead and amazingly *this same Spirit now dwells within his followers* (Rom 8:11) and empowers the ministry of the church. This is apparent throughout the book of Acts, in which the church ministers in the power of the Spirit just as Jesus had. In and by the Spirit, Christ continues to be present and active within the church and in the lives of believers (Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19). The church can function effectively as Christ's body only by being filled with the life-giving Spirit. Without the Spirit, the body of Christ would be inanimate, dead.

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In particular, two aspects of the Spirit's ministry contribute to the transformation of redeemed persons and equip them to be faithful and effective steward-priests of the new creation. First, as we grow in Christ we begin to manifest the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22). Miroslav Volf explains that the fruit of the Spirit concerns general Christian character, thus it is God's intent that all believers bear the fruit of the Spirit.[66] As Spirit-led character traits, the fruit of the Spirit comes neither automatically nor by meritorious earning but results through a process of spiritual-character cultivation in which believers cooperate with the Spirit—or better yet *participate* in the Spirit's gracious work. They do this by "living with" and "keeping in step with the Spirit" (Gal 5:25) and by crucifying "the sinful nature with its passions and desires" (Gal 5:24, 16–21). As James Peterson remarks, this process is a marathon rather than a sprint and accordingly requires sustained effort, disciplined training, and ongoing practice.[67] Through such spiritual-character formation in the Spirit, believers gradually attain to genuine freedom in Christ (Gal 5:1, 13). Second, the Holy Spirit uniquely bestows individual believers with particular spiritual gifts, in order to equip them to serve God and others in their specific, concrete life circumstances (Rom 12; 1 Cor 12; Eph 4). While the Spirit gives spiritual gifts to edify and empower the church, such gifts are not necessarily restricted to ecclesial settings. For example, the gift of evangelism is inherently directed outside the church as a ministry to unbelievers. Volf argues that the Spirit equips believers with spiritual gifts to help them pursue not only their ecclesial ministry but also their worldly calling or vocation. He writes,

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66. Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 111.

67. Peterson, *Changing Human Nature*, 41.

> All functions of the fellowship—whether directed inward to the Christian community or outward to the world—are the result of the operation of the Spirit of God and are thus charismatic. The place of operation does not define charisms, but the manifestation of the Spirit for the divinely ordained purpose.[68]

For example, Scripture records that the Holy Spirit inspired craftsmanship (Exod 35:2–3; 1 Chron 28:11–12) and anointed judges and kings to fulfill their appointed tasks (Judges 3:10; 1 Sam 16:13; 23:2; Prov 16:10). Yet it is not appropriate to attribute everything that a Christian does to a spiritual gift. According to Volf, the difference between the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit is that the former has to do with cultivating and exhibiting Christian character, while the latter concerns insights and abilities that the Spirit enables for specific and concrete tasks and situations. Both of these fundamental aspects of the Spirit's work are crucial to the Christian's calling to serve as Christ's steward-priests in the world. Through spiritual-character formation, Christians cultivate the fruit of the Spirit and increasingly operate in genuine freedom (for God and others), wisdom, and faithful consistency even as they face ever novel and challenging life situations. And through the Spirit's gracious charismatic gifting, believers receive special abilities (physical, mental, psychological, spiritually discerning, etc.) to accomplish specific tasks that God places uniquely before them.

D.   Hope and the eschatological ethical dimension

1.   New Creation

Miroslav Volf asserts that "at its very core, Christian faith is eschatological."[69] As such, Christian faith is oriented toward and directed by 'the end' or 'the final things.' But what does it mean for Christian faith to be eschatological and what kind of 'end' does it envision? First, in contrast to both over-realized eschatology and under-realized

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68.   Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 111–12.
69.   Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 79.

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eschatology, Scripture promotes an *inaugurated* eschatology. In over-realized

eschatology, for instance in some (but not all) forms of postmillennialism, the

eschatological kingdom of God is something that is either fully present in human society

or, more often, something that is fully possible within the present order of things.[70] The

danger of over-realized eschatology is that it tends to be overly optimistic about human

progress and naive concerning the continuing influence of evil in the unfolding of history.

Such confidence, once commonplace in the period following the Enlightenment, plunged

dramatically during the twentieth century, which experienced two World Wars, several

brutal totalitarian regimes, the rise of technologically proficient international terrorism,

and the moral corruption of secular western societies. Conversely, in under-realized

eschatology, for example Dispensationalism, God's eschatological kingdom is pushed

completely into the future. The danger of this perspective is that it downplays the

importance of present transformation and thereby trivializes the ethical 'kingdom'

teachings of Jesus, especially those found in the Sermon on the Mount. It views these

teachings as standards binding not for the present but only for the 'end time' when Christ

will come to set up his permanent kingdom.[71] In contrast to these two extremes, an

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70. Scripture refutes over-realized eschatology in passages such as Luke 19:11 and Acts 1:6–8. It is important to recognize that postmillennialists such as Edwards and Wesley were quite aware of human depravity and did not place their faith in the notion of human progress. Their post millennial hope stemmed from God's creativity and relentless grace, not naive trust in human ability or historical advancement.

71. Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 160. Another danger is that such a perspective can lead to inaction, apathy, or absorption in fantasizing about the future. In Acts 1:10–12, two angels appeared to the disciples who were staring up at the sky after Jesus's ascension. They scold, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." The passage can be read as a subtle critique of under-realized eschatology (as if to say: "stop daydreaming and get on with your mission!"), especially when combined with Jesus's statement in verse 8 that they were to be his witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Conversely, verses 6–8 can serve as a critique of over-realized eschatology: here Jesus refutes his disciples' expectation that he would now restore the kingdom of God to Israel. The pericope as a whole discourages both triumphalist activism and passive speculation, and instead encourages faithful witness to the rule of the King in and by the power of the Spirit.

inaugurated eschatology views God's kingdom as being *already* present but *not yet* fully

consummated. As such, it claims our allegiance, strengthens our faith and hope, directs

our vision of the future, and hence guides our present ethical action.[72] Yet because it is a

dynamic and expectant reality, rather than a static and fully achieved one, it relativizes

the goodness of the present order and encourages us always to seek God's kingdom in

greater fullness and depth. The inaugurated eschatological viewpoint best fits the New

Testament's teaching concerning the kingdom of God. For example, Miroslav Volf notes

that the kingdom prayer in Matthew's gospel (Matt 6:9–13) is a prayer for God's rule to

be increasingly realized over all the earth. Moreover, Jesus's declaration that the meek

will inherit the earth (Matt 5:5) points toward the establishment of God's kingdom *on this*

earth, rather than placing hope in some distant and ethereal 'heaven.'[73] Several other

passages also underscore the present-yet-future character of the kingdom of God. Jesus

often says that the kingdom of God is "near," "advancing," "at hand," "among you,"

"within you," and something that his disciples would experience in the present life.[74] In

Matthew 12:28, Jesus says "if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom

of God *has come upon you*."[75] At the same time, Jesus is not hereby claiming that his

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72.   Bonhoeffer writes, "It is not with the beyond that we are concerned, but with this world as created and preserved, subjected to laws, reconciled, and restored. What is above this world is, in the gospel, intended to exist for this world; I mean that, not in the anthropocentric sense of liberal, mystic pietistic, ethical theology, but in the biblical sense of the creation and of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ." Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 286.

73.   Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 94. In addition, Middleton argues that the term 'heaven' "simply does *not* describe the Christian eschatological hope. Not only is the term "heaven" never used in Scripture for the eternal destiny of the redeemed, but continued use of 'heaven' to name the Christian hope may well divert our attention from the legitimate biblical expectation for the present transformation of our *earthly* life to conform to God's purposes. Indeed, to focus our expectation on an otherworldly salvation has the potential to dissipate our resistance to societal evil and the dedication needed to work for the redemptive transformation of this world." Middleton, "A New Heaven and a New Earth," 96. On this theme, see also N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

74.   Matt 3:2; 4:17; 10:7; 11:12; Mark 1:15; 9:1; Luke 9:27; 10:9, 11; 17:21; 21:31.

75.   Emphasis added. See also Luke 11:20.

presence and actions demonstrate the full consummation of the kingdom; for, demonic power and evil continue to have influence in the present world.[76] Rather, he is claiming that his actions demonstrate the presence and power of the kingdom as a foretaste and deposit of what is to come later in fullness. Since for Jesus the kingdom of God is an inaugurated reality, Jesus intended that his teachings be taught and practised in the present lives of his followers even as they also point toward a future fulfillment of perfection and completion.[77]

Second, 'the end' has to do with the transformation of the present world into the new creation, rather than its annihilation or destruction.[78] In his book, *Work in the Spirit,* Volf contrasts these two views, which he regards as the two dominant perspectives concerning the continuity or discontinuity of the present age in relation to the age to come. He analyzes the implications of each approach for the value of human work and cultural involvement (and by extension all human activity in the world). According to Volf, in the annihilation view human action in the present world has only earthly significance and is devoid of ultimate significance.[79] Of course, as Volf points out, human action could still indirectly serve certain 'eternal' goals, such as edifying faith, fostering sanctification, and promoting Christian service. For example, human work could serve to purify one's soul of idleness or lust in preparation for heavenly

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76. Jesus elsewhere indicates that the fullness of the kingdom is a future reality. For example, "I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25; cf. Luke 22:16, 18). Jesus also describes the kingdom of God as the final banquet or feast at the end of time (Luke 13:29; 14:15).

77. Matt 5:13–20; 7:24–27; 28:20; John 8:31–32; 14:23–24.

78. According to Irenaeus, it is not the world *per se* that will be annihilated or destroyed in the age to come, but only that which is corrupted by evil and sin. He writes, "For neither is the substance nor the essence of the creation annihilated (for faithful and true is He who has established it), but 'the *fashion* of the world passeth away' (1 Cor 7:31) – i.e. 'those things among which transgression has occurred, since man has grown old in them'" (*Against Heresies* V/36.1; p. 567, emphasis original).

79. Volf, *Work in the Spirit,* 90–91.

perfection.[80] However, if human action is only a kind of prerequisite for faith, sanctification, or Christian service, then its results "are eschatologically insignificant independent of their direct or indirect influence on the souls of men and women."[81] In terms of ultimate significance, they are instrumentally helpful but not intrinsically valuable. To clarify further, Volf argues that it is "logically compatible" to affirm that the world will be annihilated while simultaneously striving to improve the conditions of the present life as part of one's duty to love and serve one's neighbour. However, such an approach is "theologically inconsistent" because belief in the eschatological destruction of the world is not consonant with a theological affirmation of the goodness of creation. Volf writes, "It makes little sense to affirm the goodness of creation and at the same time expect its eschatological destruction."[82] Correspondingly, without a theologically grounded affirmation of the inherent value and goodness of creation, "positive cultural involvement hangs theologically in the air."[83] As a result, Christians who believe in the destruction of the world tend to shy away from social and cultural involvement, a

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80. As another example, Volf imagines that if the great composer J. S. Bach were an annihilationist he could still attribute significance to his musical creativity and composition, perhaps out of a desire to edify his audience spiritually and thereby glorify God.

81. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 90.

82. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 96. Volf overstates his point here. There is nothing theologically inconsistent with affirming that God can create something of value without intending it to endure eternally An orchid can bloom beautifully only to then wither. However, Volf's general argument still holds as a critique of the eschatological destruction view because the latter has its basis in God's judgement rather than in God's originally intended purpose for creation. Withering is part of a flower's intended design, but eschatological destruction was not God's original purpose for creation. A better analogy would depict the eschatological transformation of the earth, for instance the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly, the process of giving birth, or the growth of a seed into a tree. The key is to maintain an appropriate degree of both continuity and discontinuity. Perhaps the best analogy for new creation is the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body. Romans 8:20–24 depicts the transition to new creation in terms of labour pains giving way to new birth and applies the analogy both to the whole creation and to our individual human bodies. Thus, to alter Volf's argument, belief in the eschatological destruction of the world is not consonant with a theological affirmation of *the Resurrection*. In chapters six through eight, I suggest a threefold model of cultural engagement defined in terms of cross (cruciform engagement), incarnation (incarnational engagement), and resurrection (moving in God's power to realize new possibilities).

83. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 91.

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response which for them is *theologically consistent* though not logically necessary in a strict sense.[84]

In contrast to the annihilationist view, a transformative eschatology implies that the results of the cumulative actions of human beings have intrinsic value and gain ultimate significance.[85] This is because they are *directly* related to the new creation, not just indirectly associated with it as instrumentally beneficial. Volf suggests metaphorically that noble human actions will become the 'building materials' from which the glorified world will be constructed. Not that a transformative, new creation view grants *carte blanche* approval to every kind of human action. God's judgement remains on all evil and destructive behaviour. Instead, all action that contradicts the new creation is meaningless, while all action that corresponds to it is ultimately meaningful.[86] Having acknowledged that important qualification, the transformative view affirms that human achievements in serving and creating whatever is good, true, and beautiful, will be taken up, cleansed, perfected, and thereby assimilated into God's new creation—all on the basis of Christ's redemptive work and the Spirit's regenerative and transformative activity. This approach best fits the biblical portrayal of new creation (see below). It also provides a much stronger incentive than the annihilationist position for social and cultural involvement, because it affirms the intrinsic and continuing value of human action with respect to the new creation. As Middleton argues,

> Whereas a dualistic [discontinuous] understanding of redemption typically devalues the good world God created and encourages an aspiration to transcend finitude, the biblical worldview leads to an affirmation of the goodness of creation, along with a desire to pray and work for the redemption of precisely this

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84. See also Peterson. *Changing Human Nature*, 32–33.
85. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 91–92.
86. Volf. *Work in the Spirit*, 121.

world (including human, socio-cultural institutions) that earthy life might be restored to what it was meant to be.[87]

In a new creation model, our noble efforts will not be wasted but transformed and redeployed to build and shape God's new world. Volf adds that this view not only affirms present achievement but also provides inspiration and encouragement to those whose creative, moral, or vocational efforts are not appreciated by other human beings. God sees and appreciates them. Even more affirming, God is employing them for God's own good, eternal purposes.

Volf's transformative, new creation eschatology aptly captures the New Testament's teaching concerning the destiny of the world.[88] The New Testament authors affirm that God is not planning to destroy the world but to renew and transform it. In Romans 8:21, Paul writes, "the creation itself will be *liberated* from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God" (emphasis added). Commenting on this passage, F. F. Bruce contends that "these words of Paul denote not the annihilation of the present material universe on the day of revelation, to be replaced by a universe completely new, but the transformation of the present universe so that it will fulfill the purpose for which God created it."[89] In Ephesians 1:9-10, Paul teaches that God's mysterious plan of salvation is "*to bring* all things in heaven and on earth *together* under one head, even Christ" (emphasis added). In Colossians 1:19-20, Paul writes that God was pleased to *reconcile* all things to Godself by *making peace* through his shed blood. In Revelation, the Risen Christ himself declares "I am *making* everything *new!*"

87. Middleton, "A New Heaven and a New Earth," 75.
88. See also Middleton's sketch of the biblical new creation plot: "A New Heaven and a New Earth," 80–91.
89. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963).

(Rev 21:5, emphasis added). Such transformation has already begun, because as Paul

writes, "If anyone is in Christ there is a *new creation*" (2 Cor 5:17, emphasis added). Yet

it is also a coming reality for which all of creation longs and thus "has been groaning as

in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (Rom 8:22). In Acts, while

preaching to a crowd Peter says that Jesus will remain in heaven "until the time comes for

God to *restore* everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets" (3:21,

emphasis added). Volf notes that this new creation hope corresponds to the earthly hopes

of the Old Testament prophets (e.g. Isa 11:6–10; 65:17–25), but also and more

importantly to the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body.[90] As Paul says

directly after speaking of creation's longing for redemption in Romans 8, "Not only so,

but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly

for our *adoption*, the *redemption* of our bodies" (v. 23). Thus, Peter says that "we are

looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Pet

3:13). In summary, the New Testament describes the transition from the present order to

the new creation variously in terms of liberation, bringing together, reconciling, making

peace, making new, restoration, adoption, redemption, and transition to a new heaven and

earth, not in terms of the destruction or annihilation of creation.[91]

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90. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 95.

91. See Middleton's helpful summary table in "A New Heaven and a New Earth," 90. He concludes that biblical salvation is restorative (God is repairing what went wrong with creation, not taking us out of it to live in 'heaven') as well as comprehensive and holistic (God intends to restore "all things," which includes our bodies and not just our souls). Middleton also responds effectively and persuasively to 'problem' counter texts, such as John 14:1–3, 2 Cor 5:1–10, 1 Thess 4:13–18, and Matt 24:37–41; cf. Luke 17 (pp. 91–96).

2.   Serving the kingdom of God in the power of the Spirit

Volf argues that a new creation perspective leads to a theological view of human

action as cooperation with the Spirit of God.[92] He writes, "Christian life is life in the

Spirit of the new creation or it is not Christian life at all. And the Spirit of God should

determine the whole life, spiritual as well as secular, of a Christian."[93] First, we cooperate

with God by preserving and shaping the creation that God entrusted to us. For example,

Volf observes such cooperation in Genesis 2:5, which says that there had not yet been

rain upon the earth because there was no man to till the ground. The text alludes to an

intended design of cooperation between God who sends rain and human beings who

cultivate the ground, plant seed, and harvest crops—thus serving the preservation of

God's creation. Recalling also Walton's functional framing of the Genesis account,

according to God's design creation is incomplete without the ruling presence of human

beings for its ongoing preservation and cultivation.

Second, we cooperate with God's Spirit in transforming creation.[94] This

transformative activity includes the essential elements of preserving creation just

mentioned and places them within an eschatological framework of God's new creation.

In one important sense, human beings do not *in and of themselves* make the new creation

(see point 3 below), because ultimately new creation is God's gift. In Revelation 21, the

New Jerusalem comes down to us from heaven at God's appointed time and prerogative.

Thus, realizing God's new creation involves expecting, waiting, longing, and receiving.

But this neither implies nor requires passivity or inactivity on our part, because Scripture

also exhorts us to seek the kingdom actively and to work toward its fulfilment diligently

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92.   Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 98.
93.   Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 79.
94.   Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 99–104.

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(e.g., Matt 6:33; 25:14–30). The key theological concept, which transcends the two extremes of ambitious achievement and passive (or even lazy) complacency, is *participation*. By participating in and with the Spirit of God human action actually contributes to the eschatological kingdom, which will arrive in fullness through God's final action. Moreover, in keeping with the scope of new creation, such transformation is not limited to the private lives of individuals or even the inner ecclesial life of the church. It aims more broadly to impact human culture and society, to promote the flourishing of non-human life, and to preserve and nurture the health of the earth. As Volf contends, "Because the whole creation is the Spirit's sphere of operation, the Spirit is not only the Spirit of religious experience but also the Spirit of worldly engagement."[95]

3. An eschatological qualification of teleological ethics

Christian ethics has a strong teleological orientation, being shaped by a compelling vision that human life is infused with purpose (described in this dissertation in terms of the threefold human constitution as relational, rational, and eschatological creatures) and directed toward a specific destiny (the new creation). As Volf asserts, "New creation is the end of all God's purposes with the universe, and as such, either explicitly or implicitly is the necessary criterion of all human action that can be considered good."[96] However, as the biblical language of new creation implies, Christian ethical existence is not just teleological but, more specifically, eschatological. Christian theology thus stipulates an eschatological qualification of teleological ethics. This eschatological qualification safeguards two crucial theological affirmations. First, it

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95. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 104. Volf also says that "the Spirit strives to lead both the realm of nature (*regnum naturæ*) and the realm of grace (*regnum gratiæ*) toward their final glorification in the new creation (*regnum gloria*)." (p. 119)

96. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 81.

affirms the finality of God's gracious initiative and revelatory Word over all notions of

historical necessity along with their corresponding human ideologies (whether utopian

optimism or fatalistic pessimism). This means that the progressive movement of history

is not merely evolutionary (in a self-enclosed sense) but is open and potentially

responsive to God's ongoing initiative.[97] As Volf argues, the new creation as portrayed in

Scripture does not "result [merely or primarily] from the action of intrahistorical forces

pushing history toward ever-superior states."[98] Volf explains, "Although we must affirm

the continuity between present and future orders, that affirmation should not deceive us

into thinking that God's new creation will come about in linear development from the

present order of things."[99] Moreover, God's intention that creation be open to ongoing

divine initiative means that authentic historical development is receptive to God's

revelatory Word and is framed by the larger story of God's dealings with humankind in

creation, redemption, and eschatological transformation. This is not to downplay the

significance of historical action, but to emphasize the mysterious and surprising role of

God's sovereignty within it. The Word and Spirit of God legitimize and protect the

world's genuine freedom and present existence while simultaneously qualifying and

redirecting both toward God's ultimate future end.[100] An eschatological perspective

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97. Denis O. Lamoureux helpfully distinguishes between "teleological evolution" (which includes not just random chance but also divine purpose) and "dysteleological evolution" (mere random chance, atheistic metaphysic). See his book *I Love Jesus and I Accept Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock: 2009), 3–6.

98. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 84. I have modified Volf's original statement, which reads: "A truly *new* creation can never result from the action of intrahistorical forces pushing history toward ever-superior states." As it stands, the statement is too much of a generalization. The point is not that nothing genuinely new ever transpires, but that the biblical new creation is contingent upon God's intervention and not merely the result of human efforts or historical processes (even while involving human participation by the Spirit).

99. Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 84.

100. Accordingly, Bonhoeffer argues that Jesus Christ is the centre of human history. He argues that history lives between promise and fulfillment (just as human beings live between law and gospel), however corrupted by sin it cannot fulfill its promise (just as sinful human beings cannot fulfill the law). History

therefore implies that both the present and the future are valued and affirmed. To some

degree the present exists for the sake of the future, but God's future also exists for sake of

the present and is already invading and transforming it through the liberating presence

and power of the Spirit. As Bonhoeffer puts it, God makes use of the 'penultimate,' the

things before the last, for the sake of the 'ultimate.' God preserves the present age and the

things of this world in order to speak God's ultimate justifying Word in God's own

ordained time.[101]

The second theological affirmation that is preserved by an eschatological

qualification of teleology is the reality of God's ongoing, intimate involvement with

creation. An eschatological new creation orientation is guided not simply by teleological

principles but more significantly by the activity, power, and personal presence of God's

Spirit. Consequently, it requires not only that we emphasize the dynamic and changing

quality of creation (including human beings) *in principle*, but that we actually conceive

the *telos* itself dynamically as continually unfolding before us as God's purposive will.

Eschatology goes beyond teleology (as such) because it concerns the personal in-

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finds its true meaning and destiny only in the Incarnation, life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Just as Christ take a *pro me* posture toward human beings in redemption, so he also stands *for the world* as its representative and as Lord of its history. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "Lectures on Christology," 324–27.

101. For Bonhoeffer's discussion of the penultimate and ultimate, see *Ethics*, vol. 6 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 146–70. The ultimate is the free justifying Word of God. It is ultimate or final because it comes from God alone (i.e., by means of His self-revelation) and is not preceded logically by anything. Bonhoeffer writes, "Through its content it is a *qualitatively* ultimate word. There is no word of God that goes beyond God's grace. There is nothing greater than a life that is justified before God. Because it involves a compete break with everything penultimate, with all that has gone before; because it is never the natural or necessary end of a way already pursued but rather the complete condemnation and devaluation of that way; because it is God's own free word that can never be forced from God by anything whatsoever; therefore it is the irretrievably ultimate word, the ultimate reality" (p. 149). However, paradoxically, this Word of God is also ultimate in the sense of time. Thus: "Something penultimate always precedes it, some action, suffering, movement, intention, defeat, recovery, pleading, hoping—in short, quite literally a span of time at whose end it stands. . . . There is a time of God's permission, waiting, and preparation; and there is an ultimate time that judges and breaks off the penultimate" (150–50). Consequently, we must value and affirm both penultimate and ultimate intrinsically, yet theologically God's ultimate reality takes final and determinative precedence.

breaking of God's Spirit into our present reality to shape present circumstances and guide the future outcomes. Thus, the human *telos* is not just a theoretical and abstract idea, but a personal reality in which we participate with the Holy Spirit. This dynamic approach corresponds to the biblical conception of the eschatological kingdom of God. As Dallas Willard nicely puts it, the kingdom of God is *the range of God's effective will.*[102] As such, God's present-yet-coming kingdom is not primarily a thing, a system, or a movement, but essentially concerns *God's active and present reign.* Accordingly, redeemed human beings enter into God's kingdom and serve its extension through their participation by the Spirit in the ministry of the Son (who is King and High Priest) as steward-priests of the new creation.

4.   New Creation and the call to sustain, restore, and improve as steward-priests

Human beings are called to sustain, restore, and improve creation in faithful partnership with God.[103] It is their nature to impact and shape the created world in which they are placed and of which they themselves are an integral part: "Dust you are and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19).[104] Their impact on creation is inevitable, so the salient question becomes: what kind of impact will it be? As Peterson helpfully points out, "The question is not whether we will shape our surroundings; it is whether we will do so consciously and conscientiously. Our past and present give us a starting point but not a goal. The key guide is not what we have been, but what we should be."[105] As gardeners in

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102. Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy,* 25.

103. Peterson, *Changing Human Nature,* 23–35.

104. Peterson helpfully reflects, "Beavers build a dam across a stream to create a lake to protect their lodges and make trees more accessible for food. They transform the ecosystem in which they live. That is their nature. Human beings build a dam across a river to protect their homes and provide easier access to water and irrigated food crops. That is part of our nature. Our actions can be destructive of ourselves and the rest of God's world, but they are not inherently destructive or unnatural simply because they bring about change." Peterson, *Changing Human Nature,* 32.

105. Peterson, *Changing Human Nature,* 10.

God's sacred garden, human beings are called to cultivate and improve the natural

environment, the non-human creaturely world, and even themselves. Improvement of the

natural environment includes such things as caring for the earth, reducing pollution,

responsible forestry, and conserving water and energy. However, it also includes making

the natural world more liveable for human beings, for example by constructing water

wells for the poor, designing better and more efficient ways to farm and harvest crops,

building shelters, homes, and cities, and using tools and technology to improve the

quality of life.[106] Improvement of the non-human creaturely world includes such things as

caring for endangered species, intervening in the spread of disease, population control,

and preventing the cruel treatment and exploitation of animals. Responsible self-

improvement includes a range of life-enhancing changes, from correcting and improving

vision and hearing, to curing sickness through innovations in natural/organic health care

and pharmaceutical advancement, to improving the body's immune system through

immunization and healthier lifestyles, to the eradication of disease (e.g., past examples

include small pox and polio), to surgery and genetic intervention.[107]

Human beings are called to exercise dominion over all of creation, yet creation is

enormous and the needs are seemingly endless. As finite beings we must set priorities

and make wise choices within those priorities. Two biblical metaphors provide broad

guidance in setting our priorities for care and service of creation. First, scripture depicts

human beings as priests of creation (Gen 1; 1 Pet 3:9; Rev 5:9–10). As priests they

function as God's representatives and thus aim to discern, communicate, and equip others

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106. See Peterson, *Changing Human Nature*, 52–64.

107. For a convincing argument in favour of genetic intervention, including a detailed analysis of the salient biomedical and theological issues, see Peterson, *Changing Human Nature*, 80–98. As the book unfolds, Peterson provides helpful guidelines for safe and responsible genetic intervention and improvement.

to achieve God's creative, redemptive, and eschatological purposes. Yet since part of God's purposive will is for human beings to live in freedom and responsibility, the priestly role of discerning, communicating, and equipping others to achieve God's purposes aims not to control others through rules and coercive power but to help others to appreciate and cultivate godly values and character (rules and limited coercive governmental power have their proper place within this broader mandate). Knowledge of both God's person/character and God's world (i.e., scientific knowledge of how things work) are paramount to this priestly task.

Second, Scripture depicts human beings as stewards of God's creation. Matthew 25 includes three parables that set broad parameters for how followers of Jesus should prioritize and employ their time and resources while awaiting Christ's return.[108] The first parable (the ten virgins) exhorts Jesus's followers to be ready for his imminent return. It reminds us that our time to serve and represent our Master may be quite long, but we must remain vigilant in active and faithful service in the meantime. The second parable, which is the parable of the talents, describes what we should be doing as we remain vigilant in active and faithful service. Specifically, we should be using our remaining time to multiply and employ our God-given resources. Each of us has a different mix of talents, gifts, wealth, and resources. The primary issue is not what we have, but how we use what we have. God expects us to invest all that we are and have in the extension of God's kingdom, to the very best of our ability. The key notion here is investment, which means that we are expected not simply to use our gifts or spend and enjoy our resources, but to exercise active creativity and ingenuity to multiply them for God's service. What

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108. I am here drawing insights from Peterson's discussion of Matthew 25 in *Changing Human Nature*, 33–35.

kind of investment will multiply our gifts and resources for God's service and kingdom? The final parable of the sheep and the goats answers this question. In this parable, God's people are recognized as those who used their time and resources to care for the needs of fellow human beings, especially those who are vulnerable or who are alienated from others (i.e., the hungry and thirsty, the homeless, the naked, the sick, and those in prison). In summary, we are to serve as God's stewards by our active faithfulness to Christ in the alignment of our priorities and goals, as demonstrated by our efforts to employ and multiply our gifts and resources in his service, which especially includes caring for other human beings in need.

Finally, as faithful priests and stewards of God's new creation we align ourselves under God's primary commands, which are to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love our neighbours as ourselves. Our charge is to be priests and stewards over all of creation, but in light of the Great Commandments our priority is to serve God and fellow human beings. God loves all of creation, which includes the entire *cosmos* and not just human beings (John 3:16).[109] But God loves human beings in a special and unique way as unique image bearers and covenant partners. By God's creative design we are stewards and priests of creation, but even more importantly we are God's beloved children created to be in relationship with God and one another (see chapter 3).[110] Thus, while our mandate includes caring for everything that God has made, our top priority is to love God by caring for and serving other human beings.

109. Peterson, *Changing Human Nature*, 15.

110. See also R. Paul Stevens, *The Other Six Days: Vocation, Work, and Ministry in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2000), 89–104.

5.   Concluding Summary

This chapter concludes my theological reflections on anthropology in trinitarian perspective. Following chapters three and four, which respectively depicted human persons as relational and rational creatures, this chapter depicted human persons as eschatological creatures that are created, redeemed, reoriented, and transformed to be God's steward-priests of creation/new creation. I then discussed the eschatological-ethical dimension of human existence in terms of serving the kingdom of God in the power of the Spirit and proposed an eschatological qualification of teleological ethics. I ended with some reflections on the continuing call to sustain, restore, and improve the world in light of the dawning new creation. We now move forward to the constructive section on ecclesiology, which builds upon the insights developed in this section and draws out implications for the church as relational, rational, and eschatological communities of the new humanity.

Part III: The Church as Communities of the New Humanity

Chapter 6:
The Church as Relational Communities of Love

A.   Introduction

1.   The church as communities of the new humanity

The aim of this dissertation is to explore the significance of theological

anthropology for ecclesiology. I began in chapter 1 by describing our contemporary

culture's confusion concerning what it means to be human. I argued that our inability to

define what it means to be human has devastating long-term implications, including the

dissolution of community, the disintegration and dichotomization of personal and social

ethics, and the collapse of social and global justice. In chapter 2, I provided an overview

of six dominant typological ways of construing community, based on conflicting views of

the human person that are implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) operative in

contemporary culture, and then related each type to present expressions of the church. I

observed that all of these contemporary types share two common problems, namely

reductionism and dualism. Moreover, any ecclesiology that uncritically adopts the

contemporary assumptions about being human will consequently struggle to articulate

coherently the nature of the church's sociality and the intrinsic relation of the church to

personal, social, and global ethics. I suggested that what is needed to understand and

frame ecclesiology properly is a theologically and practically 'thick' account of what it

means to be human, which clarifies and integrates the intrinsically social-personal and

ethical-spiritual character of genuine, redeemed human existence. In chapters 3–5, I

offered such an account, describing human beings as relational, rational, and

eschatological creatures to whom God relates by creating, reconciling, and transforming

them, and thereby drawing them to participate in God's own triune life and mission. The present chapter marks the beginning of the third and final section, which in parallel with the previous three chapters will construct an ecclesiology that depicts the church as relational, rational, and eschatological communities of the new humanity. In this section I will not attempt to say everything that can be said about the church, but will restrict my focus to what are in my view the most significant and relevant implications of viewing ecclesiology in light of theological anthropology.

Before we progress further, it is appropriate to pause and ask whether the New Testament provides warrant for referring to the church as the new humanity. I believe that it does, but it is important to point out that the description of the church as the new humanity is less the result of finding such terminology in proof texts than it is an overall hermeneutical framework that brings together several themes and trajectories of Scripture (as in the previous three chapters). Nevertheless, several New Testament texts taken together provide an initial precedent for such terminology and a starting point from which a more developed theology of the church as the new humanity can emerge. First, the New Testament describes Jesus Christ as the new human being. Romans 5:12–21 and 1 Cor 15:45–49 depict Christ as the second Adam, the one who lived a uniquely genuine and faithful human existence before God and thus made possible the renewal and redemption of all human beings. Moreover, Scripture teaches that while human beings were created to reflect God's image, Jesus Christ is the only human being ever to reflect God's image fully and perfectly (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3). Christ is therefore the prototypical human being in whose image redeemed human beings are being renewed and transformed (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; 1 John 3:2). Second, the New

Testament depicts redeemed persons as renewed human beings "in Christ" by the Spirit,

both personally as new men and women and corporately as the new humanity, which is

the church. In terms of personal renewal, Romans 5 says that because we are "in Christ"

we now live in triumph over sin and death (Rom 5:17). Romans 6 goes on to teach that in

baptism we were united with Christ in his death, burial, and Resurrection. We have

therefore died to sin and have been given a new kind of life, a life that is "in Christ" and

immersed in the Spirit (Rom 8). Ephesians 4:24 thus instructs believers to put on the

"new human," which has been created according to the likeness of God in righteousness

and holiness. Colossians 3:10 likewise instructs believers to put on the "new human,"

which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.[1] In terms of

corporate renewal, Galatians 3:27–28 says that we were united in Christ at baptism and

made like him; consequently, there is no longer a distinction between Jew and Gentile,

male and female, slave and free, as all are one in Christ. Romans 12:5 says that we who

are many are one body in Christ and 1 Corinthians 10:17 likewise says that we are one

bread and body in Christ. In Ephesians 2:14–15, Paul argues that Christ has brought

peace between Jews and Gentiles, having abolished their enmity in his flesh and created

in himself one new person (the church). In summary, by means of his redemptive work

Christ has achieved for human beings their objective renewal, reconciliation,

righteousness, holiness, and peace. Christ has thereby disclosed and enabled a new way

to be human; moreover, he has created "in" and for himself a new humanity (the church).

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1. The *NLT* speaks of the "new nature" and Eugene Petersons renders the phrase simply "new life." *Holy Bible, New Living Translation* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1996); Eugene Peterson, *The Message The New Testament in Contemporary English* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1993).

2.   The church as relational communities of love

In chapter three I described the human being as a relational creature invited to participate in the communion of the Trinity by sharing in the ecstatic love of God. However, in their sinfulness human beings reject this intended communion with God and, as a consequence, turn in upon themselves and experience alienation from God and other human beings. Accordingly, Christ's redemptive work includes a relational objective, which is to reverse the *cor curvum in se* (heart turned in upon itself), renew human openness to God and others, and thus make a way for reconciliation and peace. Since human redemption involves the *reconciliation* of human beings with both God and other human beings, it is an inherently social reality that aims to establish genuinely life-giving *relationships* with God and other human beings. The church is the community that God establishes to embody and promote God's reconciliatory purposes among human beings. It is the place where redeemed and reconciled human beings live with and for each other "in Christ" in the unity and power of the Holy Spirit. And it is the community that seeks, in and by Spirit, to draw all human beings into its fellowship, in its reconciliatory mission of attaining peace and extending God's family to the entire human race. It thus serves the advancement of God's one, new humanity. Its concrete embodiment takes a multiplicity of forms and thus does not destroy cultural and racial diversity (recall from chapter 5 that cultural expression is part of the human mandate), though it does seek by God's grace and power to redeem and transform sinful forms of cultural expression (e.g., ethnocentricity). The church is therefore both a means *and* an end, both an instrument *and* a goal. It is a means/instrument because it serves God's mission and message of reconciliation. Yet it is also an end/goal because it embodies and experiences what it

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serves and proclaims (by God's grace it already *IS* what it is becoming), as a proleptic

sign and foretaste of its ultimate eschatological destiny—a community of human beings

living in perfect communion with God and others in the new creation.[2] This chapter will

unpack the theme of the church as relational communities of love, first by exploring the

church's inner community life and then by suggesting implications for the church's

engagement with the world.

B.   Inner community life of the church

1.   The theological basis of Christian community

Union with each other through union with Christ in the Spirit

Christian community is not fundamentally a human achievement, but is an

objective reality "in Christ" that is increasingly realized subjectively "in the Spirit."[3] By

the power of the Spirit, Jesus Christ has achieved on our behalf reconciliation with God

and other human beings.[4] Because of Christ's work, we now have communion with each

other through our union with Christ in the fellowship of the Spirit.[5] Accordingly, Dietrich

Bonhoeffer argues that Christian community is not a human ideal, but a divine reality in

Christ.[6] It is not a "dream world" defined by cozy feelings, "blissful experiences," or

"exalted moods," in which everyone behaves exactly as we would like. Rather, genuine

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2.   See also my comments below, in light of Bonhoeffer, that Christian community in the church is not an ideal to be accomplished by human effort, but a divine *reality* in Christ in which we are invited to participate by the Spirit.

3.   This is not to endorse a radical separation of the 'objective' work of Christ and the 'subjective' work of the Spirit. Indeed, the Spirit enabled Christ to complete his 'objective work' and was fully operative in every moment on every level. Moreover, it is *Jesus Christ* whom believers subjectively encounter in the Spirit. My point here is simply that Christian community is something created objectively on our behalf, which we enter and realize more fully over time. It thus follows the same New Testament indicative-imperative pattern as justification and sanctification, grace and works, and the transformation of heart and character/life.

4.   Rom 5:1; 2 Cor 5:18–21; Eph 2:14, 16, 19; Col 1:19–22; 1 Pet 2:10; 1 John 4:9–12.

5.   1 Cor 12:4, 13; 2 Cor 13:13; Eph 4:3–4; Phil 2:1.

6.   Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, vol. 5 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Geffrey B. Kelly, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 35–38.

Christian community is messy; it brings us into fellowship with real human persons who are different from us, who possess different gifts and passions than we do, who are sometimes emotionally and spiritually wounded because of their past experiences, and who struggle with various sins and temptations. Pursuing true community involves undergoing a process of disillusionment concerning our own ideals, which are actually an impediment to genuine community. Only then can we break through to the fellowship that Christ establishes in the Spirit.[7] Bonhoeffer writes,

> Every human idealized image that is brought into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be broken up so that genuine community can survive. Those who love their dream of a Christian community more than the Christian community itself become destroyers of that Christian community even though their personal intentions may be ever so honest, earnest, and sacrificial.[8]

What Bonhoeffer is pointing out is that by pursuing an idealized dream of Christian community, we are in danger of excluding the actual people that God has put in our lives. We either exclude them from the start because they do not fit our idealized picture (perhaps our desired demographic?), or we gradually become frustrated and angry with others when they fail to meet our expectations of them. Sometimes, we fall into despair and then doubt whether pursuing Christian community is even worthwhile. As Bonhoeffer says, we "first become accusers of other Christians in the community, then accusers of God, and finally the desperate accusers of [ourselves]."[9] Bonhoeffer warns that even pastors must exercise caution in this regard, being vigilant in resisting the temptation to complain about their congregations. "Congregations have not been

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7.   Bonhoeffer argues that Christian community is empowered and led by the Holy Spirit, not by human emotion, charisma, or strategic intelligence, and political manoeuvring. In addition, it is characterized by spiritual (*agape*) love, rather than emotional and self-centred (*eros*) love. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 38–40, 42–44.

8.   Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 36.

9.   Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 36.

entrusted to them in order that they should become accusers of their congregations. . . ." When they "begin to make accusations against it, they had better examine themselves first to see whether the underlying problem is not their own idealized image, which should be shattered by God."[10] Instead, Bonhoeffer encourages pastors to intercede for their congregations before God with faith and gratitude. To clarify, Bonhoeffer is not rejecting efforts to make plans for the community or to set goals concerning its spiritual growth or mission. The New Testament is full of exhortations encouraging the church toward spiritual growth and mission. What he is cautioning against is our sinful tendency of desiring to fashion others into our own image and subjecting them to our own plans and agendas (in this case plans and agendas concerning our ideal Christian community). Such 'idealizing' betrays either a desire to control others (a will to power) or an unhealthy tendency toward enmeshment or co-dependency, which desires and 'needs' others for one's own self-fulfillment in a way that does not sufficiently respect their 'otherness' and integrity as unique persons whom God is fashioning according to God's own image.

To guard against such idealizing, Bonhoeffer emphasizes that we find genuine Christian community *only in and through Christ*. He writes,

> I have community with others and will continue to have it only through Jesus Christ. The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more everything else between us will recede, and the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is alive between us. We have one another only through Christ, but through Christ we really do *have* one another. We have one another completely and for all eternity.[11]

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10. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 37–38.
11. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 34.

Bonhoeffer develops three implications of this affirmation.[12] First, Christians need others

in community for the sake of Jesus Christ. By God's intended design, the gospel message

comes not directly from God to us individualistically; rather, it comes to us

interpersonally through other human beings who proclaim it to us and thereby draw us

unto into community with Christ and each other. Our need for Christian community thus

reflects the thoroughly relational character of human existence—from creation, through

redemption, to eschatological transformation. Furthermore, Christians constantly need

other believers to speak Christ's word to them, in order to receive encouragement,

nourishment, hope, and assurance. Second, a Christian comes to others only through

Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer reminds us that Christ himself is our peace; it is only in him that

we are one body. He writes, "He is the mediator, not only between God and human

persons, but also between person and person, and between person and reality."[13] Christ

alone is our Mediator, which means that Christ *unites us together* in himself but also that

Christ *comes between us* in order to preserve our unique identity and otherness. Since we

come into genuine communion with others only through Christ, it is Christ to whom we

are primarily accountable and whom we ultimately seek to honour in our relationships.

Accordingly, Christ's mediation preserves both genuine community and genuine

individuality. Explaining further, Bonhoeffer argues that Christ has abolished all

immediacy in human relationships. All seemingly immediate or direct relationships are

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12.   Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 31–33.

13.   Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 33. See also Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, vol. 4 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Geffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 94–99.

built upon an illusion; it is only through Christ's mediation that genuine relationships

with others are possible.[14] Bonhoeffer writes,

> Ever since Jesus called, there are no longer natural, historical, or experiential
> unmediated relationships for his disciples. Christ is the mediator between son and
> father, between husband and wife, between individual and nation, whether they
> can recognize him or not. There is no way from us to others than the path through
> Christ, his word, and our following him. Immediacy is a delusion.[15]

In and by the Spirit, Christ comes in between us to bind us together, to preserve our

legitimate separateness, and to direct our first love and loyalty to God. As Volf expresses

it, God's relation to every human person "keeps the human being as person either from

dissolving in the stream of its multiple relationships, or from disintegrating into 'a

transtemporal society' of 'moments of selfhood.'"[16] Third, Christian community is found

only in and through Christ because Christians are elected and accepted in Christ together

with the whole church from eternity (Eph 1). In the Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection,

Christ took us into himself and made us his Body. According to God's eternal plan, we

are elected *together in Christ* from all eternity and one day will live *together* with Christ

in eternal community. Bonhoeffer is here describing election in Barthian terms, but one

could affirm that believers are elected together in Christ regardless of one's interpretation

of the election of individuals (i.e., Calvinist, Barthian, or Wesleyan-Arminian).

Participating in the Trinity

As I argued in the previous section, we do not 'create' or 'achieve' Christian

community (because we are *already* in community in Christ by the Spirit), but this does

not imply that we should be passive or inactive concerning it. By God's grace and power

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14. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 93–94.
15. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 95.
16. Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness. The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 183.

we can *participate* in what God is doing to establish community among us. We can

participate by seeking it, proclaiming it, living it out, and inviting others to join it by

pointing them to its true foundation and head, Jesus Christ. The New Testament speaks of

Christians experiencing the *koinōnia* of the Holy Spirit, a word which is often translated

'fellowship' but also includes the idea of 'partnership' or 'participation.'[17] To experience

the fellowship of the Holy Spirit is not just to commune with the Spirit, individually and

corporately; it is actually to *participate* in the Spirit and thereby to experience

communion with God and each other. The same Spirit who proceeds as the mutual love

between the Father and the Son, thus completing or perfecting the ecstatic and

perichoretic relational unity of the Trinity, also unites Christian brothers and sisters

together by drawing them to share in the divine Love, and thereby to participate in God's

own trinitarian life.[18] By participating in the Spirit, Christians share together in the

trinitarian love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As Grenz puts it, "Through the Spirit,

we participate in the love that lies at the heart of the triune God himself."[19] Or as James

Torrance exclaims, "By sharing in Jesus' life of communion with the Father in the Spirit,

we are given to participate in the Son's eternal communion with the Father" and hence in

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17. I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 290

18. By using the words 'completing' and 'perfecting' I do not mean to imply that the Spirit came into existence after the Father and Son; indeed the procession of both the Son and the Spirit are eternal. Rather, the Spirit's uniting activity as Love *eternally* completes and perfects the love of the Father and Son. In any case, the focus on *perichoretic* union shifts the discussion from essential origins to eternal relations. See Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God: One Being Three Persons* (New York: T & T Clark, 1996), 175–80. Later Torrance writes, "Properly understood, then, when it is said that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, or from the Father through the Son, what is meant is that the Spirit proceeds from the Community of Being of the Father and the Son, or from the Communion (Κοινωνία) between the Father and the Son which the Holy Spirit himself is, and the three Divine Persons are in their eternal perichoretic relations with each other" (p. 192).

19. Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 484. See also Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 128–29.

the trinitarian life of God.[20] Through their sharing and participating together in the love of the Trinity, Christian brothers and sisters have unity in the Spirit and the church community begins to reflect the communion of the triune God. In this sense, the church community images the Trinity and God's own trinitarian life becomes a model for human relationships in the church. For example, from a trinitarian perspective Christian unity should not be confused with uniformity or homogeneity; genuine Christian oneness is unity-in-diversity and genuine Christian community is built upon the distinctiveness of individual persons-in-relationship.[21] While the church should not be conceived as a uniform collective, neither should it be conceived as a mere association of individuals. Trinitarian fellowship means that our bond goes much deeper than formal associative or contractual ties. Being bound together in the Spirit, we have become united in a way that is analogous (but not identical) to the unity of Father and Son. As Jesus prayed to the Father, "My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father—that just as *you are in me* and *I am in you*, so *they will be in us*, and the world will believe you sent me" (John 17:21; emphasis added).[22] Volf argues that the nature of Christian unity is obscured in both Catholicism, which tends toward uniformity, and typical Free Church models, which tend to envision the church as a group of already converted and saved Christians uniting into an associative fellowship by *their own*

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20. James B. Torrance, "The Doctrine of the Trinity in Our Contemporary Situation," in *The Forgotten Trinity*, ed. Alasdair I. C. Heron (London: BCC/CCBI Inter-Church House, 1989), 7. Quoted in Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self. A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 325.

21. Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 192–98. See also Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio. A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, vol. 1 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 60, 83, 89–94; *Life Together*, 81–83.

22. Consequently, Volf writes, "The correspondence between the trinitarian and ecclesial relationships is not simply formal. Rather, it is 'ontological' because it is soteriologically grounded. Jesus' high priestly prayer . . . presupposes communion with the triune God, mediated through faith and baptism, and aims at its eschatological consummation." Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 195.

covenant with each other.[23] In place of both the former, which corresponds more closely to monotheism (or subordinationism), and the latter, which corresponds more closely to tritheism, Volf sets out to construct a trinitarian Free Church ecclesiology that takes seriously a trinitarian, participatory model of church unity-in-diversity in Christ by the Spirit.

It is important to stress that the church images the Trinity metaphorically, not literally. Miroslav Volf, who endorses the notion of the church as the image of the Trinity, acknowledges, "It does not seem that the conceptualization process proceeds simply in a straight line from above (Trinity) to below (church and society) and that social reality is shaped in this way."[24] Volf qualifies the correspondence between church and Trinity with three observations.[25] First, in contrast to divine unity, human beings need to cultivate a will for unity and a covenant to bind them together. Second, ecclesial communion is not yet full and consummated. Third, human beings do not indwell other persons, as do the divine persons (and as the Spirit does in humans). As I argued in the preceding paragraph, is it only by virtue of our participation in the Spirit's uniting love and presence that Christians become united in Christ. It is possible for us to be together "in Christ" only because the Spirit is "in" each of us. As Volf argues, "It is not the mutual perichoresis of human beings, but rather the indwelling of the Spirit common to everyone that makes the church into a communion corresponding to the Trinity, a communion in

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23. But see Brian Hamilton, "The Ground of Perfection: Sattler on the 'Body of Christ,'" in *New Perspectives in Believers Church Ecclesiology*, ed. Abe Dueck, Helmut Herder, and Karl Koop (Winnipeg: CMU, 2010), 143–60. While Hamilton acknowledges that an associative conception of the church unfortunately characterizes much of the believers church tradition, the tradition also includes voices that promote a more participatory model of church and ethics. For example, central to the theology of Michael Sattler was the theme of union with Christ by incorporation into the Body of Christ, which for Sattler theologically grounded both Christian community and Christian ethics.

24. Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 194.

25. Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 207–11.

which personhood and sociality are equiprimal."[26] The Holy Spirit opens Christians to

one another and allows them to become what Volf calls "catholic persons," who in their

individual uniqueness both give and receive, influence and are shaped, within and by

their relationships with others.[27] Consequently, the church does not reflect the image of

the Trinity simply because it is a community that tries to imitate the triune relationships.[28]

It reflects the image of the Trinity because it is comprised of individual exocentric human

beings whom the Spirit of God indwells and thereby frees to love and serve God and

others genuinely. Just as God created individual human beings in the divine image to be

other-centred and to find their fulfilment in relationship with God and other human

beings (see chapter 3), so now God redeems and transforms human beings to cultivate

relational fulfilment with God and others in the church community (though complete

fulfilment awaits eschatological consummation).[29] This model of trinitarian-ecclesial

correspondence provides a theological framework to support Luther's assertion: "A

Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbour. Otherwise he is not a

Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbour through love."[30] As Luther

observed, this notion of living "in Christ" and "in" one's neighbour has important

implications for practical Christian life and ethics, as we will discuss later in the chapter.

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26.   Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 213.

27.   Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 212. See also Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 326, 334.

28.   As I noted in chapter 3, what I am proposing is a modified form of social trinitarianism, which proceeds not simply from Trinity to human community but from Trinity through anthropology and soteriology to ecclesial community.

29.   Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 325–28, 334–36. Grenz writes, "The self emerges *extra se* in that participation 'in Christ' constitutes the identity of participants in the new humanity" (p. 326).

30.   Martin Luther, *On Christian Liberty*, trans. W. A. Lambert and Harold J. Grimm (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 62.

One implication of the foregoing discussion of Christian life as participating together in the life of the Trinity is that Christian soteriology must be conceived relationally rather than merely individualistically. As Bonhoeffer asserts, "Whoever seeks to become a new human being individually cannot succeed. To become a new human being means to come into the church, to become a member of Christ's body."[31] Volf explains that if salvation were to take place between God and the individual soul then it would be individualistic and functionalist. Consequently, church membership could not be an expression of what Christians *are*, but only a pragmatic implication of what they should *do*.[32] Conversely, while Christian salvation certainly includes the redemption of individuals (an affirmation that preserves the importance of personal intimacy with and loyalty to God) it also necessarily has a corporate dimension. The same redemptive act that delivers human beings from sin and death also places them into communion with God and each other. They are therefore redeemed *together*, not in isolation. As the first letter of Peter portrays it, *as we come* to Christ God is building us into a spiritual temple and reconstitutes us as God's new people (1 Pet 2:5, 9–10). Accordingly, as Grenz writes,

> As this occurs, the church serves as a community of salvation. Thereby, it truly becomes a fellowship of those whose relationships are being transformed by the power of the indwelling Spirit to reflect as far as possible in the midst of the brokenness of the present the eschatological community modeled after the fullness of love present within the dynamic of the triune God.[33]

Being in the church is *intrinsically* related to the believer's salvation (not just a secondary 'application'), not because the church is an institutional dispenser of salvation but because it is the community in which reconciliation is embodied and transformation takes

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31. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 219. Elsewhere Bonhoeffer argues, "For this much is certain: there is no community with Jesus Christ other than the community with his body! It is in this body along that we are accepted and able to find salvation." (p. 216)

32. Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 172.

33. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*, 335. See also Grenz, *Theology*, 481.

place. It is the place in which redeemed human persons practice and live out concretely their restored relationships with God and others.

2.   The church as the Body of Christ

One of the ways that the New Testament describes the corporate life of Christians is by depicting the church as the Body of Christ (Rom 12:3–8; 1 Cor 12:12–31; Eph 4:1–16; Col 1:15ff). According to George Ladd, this is the most distinctive Pauline metaphor for church and Guthrie views it as the most vivid and expressive one.[34] It is employed to convey several important truths. First, it depicts the oneness of the church in terms of unity-in-diversity.[35] On the one hand, although it is comprised of many members the church is essentially one. Every member is important and contributes to the functioning of the whole. Every member has been baptized into one Body and partakes in one Spirit. Just as the parts of the human body are linked together and function interdependently for the benefit of the entire body, so each member of the congregation is linked to the others and exists to serve the whole community. On the other hand, this oneness does not mean uniformity. The church is not a homogenous collective, but a community of distinct and inter-relating persons. Each person is uniquely called and gifted by the Holy Spirit to contribute to the congregation in some way. Every individual person is significant; in fact, each person's individuality or otherness enriches and edifies the group.[36]

The New Testament applies the body metaphor to the church both as a local congregation and as a universal entity.[37] In Paul's earlier letters the image refers to local

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34.   George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 590; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1981), 744.

35.   Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 274–75.

36.   See Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 220–21.

37.   Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 592; Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 743; and Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 462.

congregations, but in Colossians and Ephesians it broadens in scope to include the church

universal. Its application to the local congregation reflects the fact that each and every

local congregation that meets the criteria for being a church is in fact fully a church.[38]

Every congregation is a church in the full sense of the term because Christ is fully present

to each by the Spirit.[39] Every church is therefore a microcosm of the whole rather than a

part of the whole or, as Grenz puts it, every congregation is the "church in miniature"

characterized by "all the lofty phrases used in the New Testament of 'the church.'"[40] At

the same time, every genuine local congregation is related to every other local

congregation and thus exists simultaneously as the church universal.[41] All local churches

are related in Christ because the same Spirit constitutes their existence and maintains

their unity. Accordingly, Volf argues that the church's catholicity parallels the catholicity

of individual believers. Specifically, it is a spiritual catholicity attained in and by the

Holy Spirit and characterized by openness toward all other churches (a kind of corporate

exocentricity). It is not an institutional catholicity guaranteed by ecclesiastical authority

structures. As a defining mark of its existence, this catholic openness is an indispensable

condition of a congregation's ecclesiality. A local church cannot claim to be a church in

sectarian isolation from other churches. In addition, every congregation as a catholic

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38. Volf's defining criteria serve well: "Every congregation that assembles around the one Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord in order to profess faith in him publicly in pluriform fashion, including through baptism and the Lord's Supper, and which is open to all churches of God and to all human beings, is a church in the full sense of the word, since Christ promised to be present in it through his Spirit as the first fruits of the gathering of the whole people of God in the eschatological reign of God. Such a congregation is a holy, catholic, and apostolic church." Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 158 (original italics removed).

39. Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 154–55.

40. Grenz, *Theology*, 468.

41. Volf helpfully suggests that the tension between locality and universality is best resolved not in spatial terms such as a part-whole dynamic, but in eschatological terms of anticipation and fulfillment. He writes, "The local church is not a concrete realization of the existing universal church, but rather the real anticipation or proleptic realization of the eschatological gathering of the entire people of God." Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 140.

community of the new humanity must be characterized by openness to all human beings, because Christ is the Saviour and Lord of all.[42]

Second, the image of the Body of Christ implies that all who serve by using their spiritual gifts are making an important contribution (Rom 12:3–8). There is no place in the church for spiritual elitism. While it is true that certain gifts are more foundational and formative for the whole community than others (1 Cor 12:27–31; Eph 4:11), each person is equal in value and dignity and should be treated with love and respect. In this regard, it is interesting to note that in both Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12–13, Paul follows his explanation of the proper functioning of spiritual gifts (using the 'Body of Christ' metaphor) with a discussion of the primacy of love and humble service. What matters is not the gift(s) one possesses (only God can be credited and glorified for that) but how one uses one's gift(s) to edify others as God leads and enables. Thus, Paul instructs church members to be self-aware, to know their own strengths and weaknesses and to exercise humility as they seek to make a contribution to the community (Rom 12). To do this, believers must appreciate the importance of all of the gifts to the church community and seek guidance and mentoring from others as they learn to discern and use their own particular gifts.

The church as the Body of Christ thus lends support to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. The New Testament refers to the church as a "royal priesthood" and a "kingdom of priests," thereby universalizing the concept of priesthood and calling every believer into some kind of ministry. Properly speaking Christ alone is priest; when the term 'priest' is applied to believers in the New Testament, it is always in

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42. See Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 156–58.

the context of *all believers* who share vicariously in the priesthood of Christ (e.g., 1 Pet

2:5, 2:9; Rev 1:6, 5:10, 20:6). Moreover, the Old Testament distinctions of race, social

status, and gender lose their significance as qualifying factors for priesthood.[43] Rather,

the particular ministry to which a believer is called depends on her calling and gifting by

the Holy Spirit.[44] By Baptism and through the reception of the Holy Spirit, every believer

becomes a 'priest,' receives spiritual power and gifts, and is thereby called to minister in

that power and giftedness both within and outside the church.[45]

Third, the image of the Body of Christ implies a close relationship with Christ,

expressed in loyalty, obedience, and service to his desires and plans. In his earlier use of

the image, in Romans and 1 Corinthians, Paul employs the body metaphor to describe the

relationships between believers in terms of unity built upon diversity, mutual service, and

loving interdependence. In his later letters, namely Colossians and Ephesians, he adds a

new detail: Christ is the head of the body and thus the Lord of the church.[46] Christ is

present in the church, yet he also transcends and surpasses it (the church is not simply an

extension of the Incarnation).[47] This development in Paul's use of the body metaphor is

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43. Stanley J. Grenz, "Biblical Priesthood and Women in Ministry," in *Discovering Biblical Equality Complementarity Without Hierarchy*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 278.

44. As Paul writes, "Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all . . . God manifests the Spirit through each person for the good of the entire church. . . . The Holy Spirit alone decides which gift a person should have" (1 Cor 12:4, 7, 11b).

45. Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit Toward a Theology of Work* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 111–12. See also my article "Women Sharing in the Ministry of God: A Trinitarian Framework for the Priority of Spirit Gifting as a Solution to the Gender Debate," *Priscilla Papers* 22 (Autumn 2008): 14–15, 17.

46. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 220.

47. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 746. In his early works, Bonhoeffer described the church in terms of "Christ existing as church-community." As his theology matured, he increasingly stressed Christ's otherness and transcendence over the community as its Counter-*Logos*, Lord, and Mediator, though he retained a strong incarnational emphasis on the presence of Christ in other human beings. He increasingly identified the church with its crucified Lord and portrayed it as a community of the cross. Moreover, he shifts his focus from Christ simply "existing as church community" to Christ taking concrete form in the church.

probably in response to the rise of false teachers and heretical ideas, both of which tempted the churches to compromise their loyalty to Christ alone, their corresponding counter-cultural way of life, and their witness to the world.[48] Paul calls the church to remain faithful to its Lord.

In his discussion of the Body of Christ, Bonhoeffer closely associates the presence of Christ with the church: "The church of Christ is Christ present through the Holy Spirit. . . . The life of believers in the church-community is truly *the life of Jesus Christ in them* (Gal 2:20; Rom 8:10; 2 Cor 13:5; 1 John 4:15)."[49] Moreover, since the church serves a *crucified* Lord it must therefore be a community of the cross, which is devoted to a cruciform pattern of discipleship and self-giving. He writes, "In the community of the crucified and transfigured body of Jesus Christ, we take part in Christ's suffering and glory. Christ's cross is laid upon the body of the church-community."[50] Christ said that his disciples would have to deny themselves daily, pick up their cross, and follow him (Matt 10:38; 16:24; see also Phil 2:5–11). Fittingly, Christians are baptized into Christ's death so that they can begin to share in his resurrection life (Rom 6; Phil 3:10–11). In his discussion of the Body of Christ in Romans 12, Paul says that Christians are called to offer their own bodies as living sacrifices to God and to care for others through mutual service, hospitality, forgiveness, and non-retaliation (they must

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48. In the case of Colossians, Marshall suggests that Paul was confronting a misleading philosophy (and its teachers), which combined certain Jewish elements together with Asian religion. One aspect of this religion was a belief in spiritual powers which threatened human life and needed to be placated through worship and ascetic practices. In response (Col 1–2), Paul presents Christ as the creator of all that exists and the supreme ruler over all powers, spiritual or otherwise, which he disarmed by means of the cross. Christ is the head of the Church, and supports it, holds it together, and makes it grow. Therefore, Paul exhorts the Colossians to "continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Col 2:6b–7). See Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 366–69.
49. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 221.
50. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 221.

deny themselves personal vengeance and instead commit to conquering evil with good). God promises to use their humility, weaknesses and dependency on God to accomplish God's own glorious purposes (2 Cor 11:16–33). Christians are also called to share each other's burdens (Gal 6:2), to give to those in need (Matt 5:42; 1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8:1–15; 9:1–15; Eph 4:28), to endure humiliation for the sake of the gospel (1 Cor 1:18–2:5), and to suffer for the sake of righteousness, justice, and truth (Matt 5:10–12; 2 Thess 1:1–18; 1 Pet 3:13–22; 4:12–19). Just as Christ suffered vicariously for us, so we are called to a ministry of "vicarious representative action" by suffering with and for others.[51] In so doing, by the grace and power of the Spirit we bring the concrete presence of Christ to other human beings. As Luther put it, we become "little Christs" to them.

3.   Relational ministries of the church

Viewing the church as a relational community of love highlights several important relational ministries to which the church is called. First, the church is called to the ministry of reconciliation. It is to be the community ruled by the love and peace of Christ, which comes between members to resolve their differences and settle their conflicts (Col 4:15). It is therefore a community of confession and forgiveness. Jesus told his disciples that they would receive forgiveness as they themselves forgave others who offended them and Paul says that we are to extend mercy and forgiveness just as we have received mercy and forgiveness from God (Matt 6:14; Col 4:12–13). As a community of justified sinners, rather than an idealized utopia of perfect people, the church consists of people who have received forgiveness and acceptance in Christ and who extend that same forgiveness and acceptance to others. As Bonhoeffer says, the church is "the community

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51.   Vicarious representative action is a theme in Bonhoeffer (e.g., *Discipleship*, 90, 222).

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of those who have truly experienced God's costly grace, and who thereby live a life worthy of the gospel which they neither squander nor discard."[52] It is not thereby a place that avoids conflict or downplays the hurt caused by sin; rather, it aims to resolve conflict truthfully, lovingly, and graciously.[53] Sometimes discipline is necessary, as when the church has to stand by a victim and against an unrepentant offender, but such discipline should be offered in love and in hope of repentance and reconciliation (Matt 18:15–20; Jas 5:19–20).[54] It is also a community of social reconciliation, one which breaks down dividing walls that separate people and divide them into hierarchical classes of privileged and unprivileged, according to their race, nationality, gender, and socio-economic status (Gal 3:26–28; Jas 2:1–9). As Paul writes to the Corinthians, we must no longer evaluate others by what the world thinks of them, but instead see them in light of the new creation as brothers and sisters in Christ (2 Cor 5:16–17).

Second, the church is called to the ministry of mutual edification. As previously discussed, the church as the Body of Christ promotes the priesthood of all believers. It actively seeks to discern the gifts and abilities of its members and encourage people to serve accordingly. Some forms of service focus on the worship gathering and everything involved in making it happen. Other forms of service take place throughout the week, such as one-on-one mentoring and discipling, small group ministry, hospitality, encouragement, spiritual friendship and accountability, and actively welcoming and

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52. Bonhoeffer also writes, "The community of saints is not the 'ideal' church-community of the sinless and perfect. It is not the church-community of those without blemish, which no longer provides room for the sinner to repent. Rather it is the church-community that shows itself worthy of the gospel of the forgiveness of sins by truly proclaiming God's forgiveness, which has nothing to do with forgiving oneself." Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 269.

53. This includes working with experienced experts (doctors, therapists, mental health experts, lawyers, etc.) when facing more serious situations.

54. As Bonhoeffer notes, it is important to proclaim both forgiveness and repentance, both faith and obedience together as one reality in following Christ (*Discipleship*, 269; see also Bonhoeffer's discussion of cheap and costly grace, pp. 43–56).

integrating new members into the community. In the context of mutual edification, the role of the pastor is to be a shepherd and an equipper. As a shepherd, the pastor personally knows and cares for her flock. As part of her care, the pastor is aware of the needs and struggles of her congregants (so far as congregants are willing to confide) and seeks appropriately and discerningly to be a catalyst for care in the congregation by drawing others into ministry according to their gifts and maturity. In this way, pastoral care becomes not a solitary affair but a communal ministry. This requires the pastor (and other key leaders) to be primarily an equipper who strategically trains all God's people in the congregation for ministry in order to build up and edify the whole Body of Christ (Eph 4:12), rather than a chaplain who cares for many but does not necessarily have a coherent strategy for leadership, ministry training and deployment.

Third, the church is called to the ministry of bearing one another's burdens.[55] This includes providing for those in need by sharing our resources and giving financially (Acts 2:43–47; 4:32–37; Matt 5:42; 6:1–4; 1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8:1–15; 9:1–15; Eph 4:28). It also includes bearing one another's emotional burdens by encouraging one another, strengthening each other's faith, and "really loving" each other with actions and not just words (Rom 12:9; Col 4:16–17; 1 John 3:18; 4:11–12). Moreover, it includes bearing each other's weaknesses and sinfulness by exhorting each other to holiness and keeping each other accountable (Matt 18:15–20; Rom 14; Gal 6:1–2; Heb 12:14–17). In addition, it involves caring for the lonely, the sick, the elderly, and the oppressed (Matt 25:31–46; Acts 6:1–4; 1 Tim 4:1–16). It is important to remember that bearing the burdens of others is not a service that we perform paternalistically. As Murphy David of the Open Door

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55. See Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 100–3.

ministry cautions: "Without supper, without love, without table companionship, justice can become a program that we *do* to other people."[56] Properly speaking, bearing the burdens of others is *Christ's* ministry in which we humbly participate by the Spirit. Moreover, it is a formative practice that gradually shapes us to be more like Christ (when done with the right motivation and attitude). Finally, bearing the burdens of others can be a source of joy, because in so doing we share in the sufferings of Christ by participating in his priestly ministry.[57]

Fourth, the church is called to a cruciform pattern of discipleship. It is called to be a community of the cross, which lives counter-culturally because of its loyal dedication to its crucified Lord (Matt 5–7; Rom 12:1–2). It will be characterized by distinct values and priorities, which align with God's kingdom purposes. It will aim to model God's character and pursue God's will in its life and mission. It will hold a different view of who is valuable and truly blessed (Matt 5:1–12), who is wise (1 Cor 1:18–31; Jas 3:13–18), who is successful (Matt 6:19–21; Luke 12:13–34; 18:18–30), and who is genuinely holy, righteous, and full of faith (Matt 6:1–18; Mark 7:1–23; Luke 7:1–10; 36–50; 9:46–48; John 4:43–54). Moreover, it will model a different approach to leadership, namely servant leadership characterized by humility, grace, and self-giving (Matt 20:20–28; Mark 9:33–37; 10:35–45; Phil 2:5–11). As a counter-cultural community of the cross, it will live in the midst of the world as salt, light, a city set on a hill (Matt 5:13–16), and a colony of citizens of heaven (Phil 3:17–21) or "resident aliens."[58] Sometimes it will be

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56. Quoted in Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 74.

57. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 102.

58. Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

called to suffer persecution, as a result of living in faithfulness to Christ in a hostile environment (Matt 5:10–12; John 15:18–27; 1 Pet 4:12–19).

4. Constitutive and formative practices

The church is equipped for its relational ministry through constitutive and formative practices. Primary among these are the constitutive ministries of the Word and the sacramental ordinances.[59] The ministries of the Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper are constitutive for the church's existence, in other words they are its definitive marks, because they are fundamental to the creation and extension of the church.[60] The proclamation of the Word (preached and witnessed) calls people to God and brings them together as a fellowship of the Word. Baptism marks their 'new birth' and entrance into the fellowship, while the Lord's Supper sustains their communal life as the Body of Christ. These central ministries form and shape the church to be relational, rational, and eschatological communities of the new humanity, but here I will just touch briefly on their relational significance (see chapters 7 and 8 for their rational and eschatological significance respectively). The relational aspect of the ministry of the Word takes two forms. First, it takes the form of the preached Word, which addresses the congregation with the gospel of reconciliation. Preachers announce the good news that by God's grace

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59. The term 'sacramental ordinance' is my own, reflecting my belief that these two constitutive and sustaining church rites are both sacramental and ordained. Their being sacramental means that they mediate God's presence and grace. In this view many things are 'sacramental', for example marriage, the church, and creation (see Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology: Vol 2: The Works of God* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1999], 251). Their being ordinances means that Christ himself specifically initiated and set apart Baptism and the Lord's Supper to be special covenantal (Calvin), converting (Wesley), acts of commitment (Grenz). As sacramental ordinances, these practices draw believers into participating in deep mysteries in which God is at work. At the same time, they are a faithful response to Christ's specific commands: "Go and make disciples . . . baptizing them . . ." (Matt. 28:19); and "Do this in remembrance of me . . ." (Luke 22:19). In sum, I am using the term 'sacrament' to stress mystery and participation in God's gracious activity and 'ordinance' to stress the obedient faith response of the believer.

60. Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 152–53. Grenz refers to the sacraments as "community acts of commitment." For Grenz, Baptism is the seal of Christian identity and depicts union with Christ, the forgiveness of sins, the transfer of loyalties, and entrance into the church. The Lord's Supper is a continual reaffirmation of Christian identity and loyalty to Christ. See Grenz, *Theology*, 511–40.

people can be reconciled to God and to one another. Second, it takes the form of personal address, as Christian brothers and sisters share in the ministry of the Word by speaking God's Word to one another in order to teach, edify, encourage, correct, and rebuke each other in love. Bonhoeffer argues that Christians need other Christian brothers and sisters to speak God's Word to them because "the Christ in their own hearts is weaker than the Christ in the word of other Christians. Their own hearts are uncertain; those of their brothers and sisters are sure."[61] The ministry of the word is inherently relational, because it brings God's Word to us objectively; it comes from outside of ourselves from another and thus has a special power to cut through the darkness, doubt, and selfishness of our own self-enclosed hearts. One's subjective internal thoughts and feelings can obscure one's understanding of God's Word and will. An apt word from a wise Christian brother or sister provides helpful perspective, increased accountability, and perhaps even Spirit inspired guidance.

What about the sacramental ordinances? The relational significance of Baptism is that through Baptism believers ratify their union with Christ, thus affirming their trust and loyalty to Christ as Saviour and Lord, and come into communion with the counter-cultural community of faith. While believers' union with Christ is ratified in Baptism, their union with other believers in the community of faith is ratified by entering into covenant with them.[62] The relational significance of the Lord's Supper is that believers regularly celebrate the real presence of Christ with them and the resulting communion they enjoy with one another "in Christ" by the Spirit.[63] Moreover, they remember and

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61. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 32.
62. For the importance of community covenants, see Grenz, *Theology*, 480.
63. Many Baptist theologians (and others in the tradition of congregational polity and ordinances) have moved closer to a sacramental understanding of Baptism and the Lord's Supper in the sense that these

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celebrate God's act of *making peace* with and between them through the shed blood of

Christ. Thus, "In receiving Christ's broken body and spilled blood, we, in a sense, receive

all those whom Christ received by suffering."[64] In addition, the Lord's Supper as 'Holy

Communion' is a constant reminder that believers are to care for and support one another

by sharing what they have with those in need (1 Cor 11:17–34). It thus reinforces the

nature of the church as a community that breaks down dividing social, cultural, and

economic walls of separation.[65]

In addition to the church's constitutive practices, several formative practices

sustain the relational life of the church. One such practice is worship. Worship is a broad

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are not just statements of a believer's beliefs or symbols of an absent Christ. Rather, they are deep spiritual mysteries in which believers participate by the Holy Spirit in something that God is doing and in which Christ is really present in a special way (not least in that the gospel is embodied by them). For example, Finger, referring to his approach as "communal presence," writes, "The Eucharist . . . conveys Jesus' real, communal and memorial presence as a primary manifestation of grace birthing the new creation in visible communal form." Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 208. See also: Grenz, *Theology*, chapter 19; Donald G. Bloesch, *The Church: Sacraments, Worship, Ministry, Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 149–75; and Clark H. Pinnock, Clark, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 113–47. In my view, we should reject false dichotomies that force us to choose between symbol and real presence, between remembrance of the past and celebration of present blessings, and between theological affirmations and ethical implications. A participatory model embraces each of these perspectives and provides them with an overarching framework that is sufficiently theological, Christological, and pneumatological—and hence fully trinitarian. Moreover, it accounts for the varied biblical concepts and metaphors associated with the sacramental ordinances. For example, Scripture depicts the Lord's Table as: 'breaking of the bread' (Acts 2:42; Luke 24:30-31, 45), emphasizing the presence of the Risen Christ in the church; the Lord's 'last supper' (1 Cor. 11:17-24; Matt. 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24; Rev. 19:6-9), emphasizing our remembrance of God's past saving deeds (the cross, but also alluding to the Exodus and Passover) and their future completion (the eschatological banquet); 'eucharist' (John 6:11; 1 Cor. 11:24), emphasizing our present sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; and 'communion' (1 Cor. 10:16), emphasizing the mystical bond of our fellowship with Christ and other believers as we participate in the body and shed blood of Christ.

64. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace. A Theological Explanation of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 129. See also Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company. The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 40.

65. Note that Paul's stern rebuke and warning to the Corinthians that some were partaking of the supper in an unworthy fashion and were thus incurring God's judgement on themselves (11:27–30) concerned their greediness and their failure to make sure everyone had enough to eat (see 11:17–22). His exhortation for believers to "examine themselves" does not refer primarily to a moment of private, inner confession (though in might lead to such examination by way of *application*); it refers rather to social sin against the Body of Christ and their need for repentance and reconciliation. This aspect of the Lord's Supper is reflected strongly in the Anabaptist tradition. See, for example, Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology*, 202–7.

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subject that concerns all of one's life (Rom 12:1) and can be discussed from many different angles. As a relational practice, however, worship draws believers together before God in the Spirit to rest in God's presence and to offer praise, adoration, and thanksgiving unto God. As James B. Torrance defines it, "worship is the gift of participating by the Spirit in the incarnate Son's communion with the Father."[66] It therefore serves to increase the community's intimacy with God and fills them with wonder over who God is and what God has done for them in Christ. In addition, the genuine practice of worship preserves the relational integrity of believers before God. In other words, genuine worship can be offered only by communities that are characterized by life-giving, holy, and God-honouring relationships between members. Jesus instructed his disciples that if they go to the temple to offer a sacrifice to God but remember that they have a dispute with a brother or sister, they should first go and be reconciled to that person before giving their offering to God (Matt 5:23–24). Bonhoeffer comments strongly on this passage, asserting that "Contempt for others makes worship dishonest and deprives it of any divine promise. Individuals as well as church communities who intend to enter God's presence with contemptuous or unreconciled hearts are playing games with an idol."[67] Such worship is idolatrous because it involves violating God's explicit command to love our neighbour and thus pushes the true God out of the mind of the worshipper. It is therefore dishonest and false. As the first letter of John says, "anyone who does not love does not know God" and "anyone who claims to love God but hates a Christian brother or sister is a liar" (4:8, 20). In addition to loving others, Scripture teaches that genuine worship involves pursuing just and righteous relationships and social

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66. James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community & the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 30.

67. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 123.

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arrangements—economically, sexually, and in leadership and governance (e.g., Isa 1:12–17; Amos 5; Mic 6:8; Rom 12–14; 1 Cor 6:9–20; Eph 5–6; Col 3–4).[68] Thus, genuine worship as a relational practice involves coming before God to offer praise with honest and open hearts, as faithful servants who aim to live our entire lives as a sacrifice of worship unto God by loving God with all that we are and have and by loving our neighbours as ourselves.

Several other practices also serve the relational formation of Christian communities, including the disciplines of solitude, confession, submission, service, and prayer (especially prayer as confession and absolution, supplication, and intercession).[69] I will highlight just two of these presently. The practice of solitude is important because genuine community involves a dialectic interplay between the individual and the group, corresponding to time spent being alone and time spent in community. As Bonhoeffer warns, "Whoever cannot be alone should beware of community. . . . Whoever cannot stand being in community should beware of being alone."[70] The practice of solitude allows the individual to centre herself in God and avoid being assimilated and overshadowed by the identity of the community and the expectations of others. It also helps the community as a whole to guard against harmful co-dependency and enmeshment. On the other hand, the practice of solitude exists not for its own sake but is intended to build and strengthen the community. As argued throughout this chapter, the Christian life is not a solitary existence but involves life in community in the Body of Christ. Solitude and community are both important and mutually enriching. Emphasizing

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68. See also Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 264–65.

69. For a good discussion of these practices, see Richard J. Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978) and *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

70. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 82 (italics removed).

one over the other is unhealthy. As Bonhoeffer says, "Each taken by itself has profound

pitfalls and perils. Those who want community without solitude plunge into the void of

words and feelings, and those who seek solitude without community perish in the

bottomless pit of vanity, self-infatuation, and despair."[71]

The practice of confession is important to the integrity of the Christian

community because it helps to preserve its honesty before God as well as healthy

relationships between members. Confession can be practiced both corporately in worship,

through song and liturgy, and individually in the form of one Christian brother or sister

confessing to another in an accountability relationship. Bonhoeffer emphasizes the

second form of confession, because confessing to another Christian helps break sinful

patterns and habits.[72] It does this, first, by bringing secret sins into the light to be exposed

and disarmed of their power.[73] Secondly, it prevents the confessor from self-delusion,

ensuring that the Christian is actually confessing *to God* through another concrete and

objective person in order to seek *transformation*, and is not just confessing to herself in

order to absolve her own guilty conscience. Third, the practice of confession brings both

the confessor and the confidant before God and reinforces the mediation of Christ

between them and thus the church's nature as a community of gospel reconciliation. It

serves to renew and restore their community *in Christ*. Finally, the practice of confession

leads to a true sense of forgiveness and assurance of one's salvation. The practice of

genuine confession can therefore foster a community that is characterized by humility,

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71. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 83.

72. For Bonhoeffer's discussion of confession, see *Life Together*, 108–16.

73. Bonhoeffer writes, "Sin wants to be alone with people. It takes them away from the community. The more lonely people become, the more destructive the power of sin over them. . . . Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of what is left unsaid sin poisons the whole being of a person." But, "sin that has been spoken and confessed has lost all its power." Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 110.

gratitude, thanksgiving, and joy. Bonhoeffer suggests two precautions concerning the

practice of confession. First, only those who practice confession themselves should hear

the confessions of others. They must be humble and gracious, knowing personally the

forgiving and restoring touch of God's grace in their own lives. Second, we must not

make confession into a meritorious transaction in which the confessor is believed to

"score points" with God, so to speak. Instead, we confess because we are assured in the

gospel of God's redemptive work and loving will to forgive. In addition to Bonhoeffer's

precautions, I would add further that it is important to choose for one's confidant a

mature believer who is equally serious about pursuing holiness through God's grace.

Moreover, as confession is an intimate matter one should avoid placing oneself and the

other into temptation. For example, one should confess an addiction to someone other

than a presently struggling addict (aside from therapeutic groups such as Alcoholics

Anonymous). Or, if the confession is sexual in nature, one should probably confess to

someone of the same gender.

C.   The church engaging the world

God wants the church to be a community of love, characterized by life-giving

relationships of care and mutual service. But God does not want the church to be insular.

By God's design the church is called to be not only a community of redeemed Christians

worshipping God and ministering to one another, but also an outward-oriented or

exocentric community that reaches out to the world, extending the love of God and the

hope of the gospel to all.[74] Just as the Holy Spirit turns the hearts of individual human

beings outside of themselves toward Christ and other persons, so the Holy Spirit also

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74.   Thus, there is an intra-ecclesial and extra-ecclesial exocentric orientation of the church. Intra-ecclesially, the members of the Body of Christ are oriented to serving and loving each other; extra-ecclesially, they are oriented to serving and loving the people of the world.

turns the church community as a whole outside of itself toward the world in mission. The Christian faith is, at both the personal and corporate levels, inherently other-oriented. To extend Luther's dictum cited earlier: *the church lives not in itself, but in Christ and in the world. Otherwise it is not the church. It lives in Christ through faith, in the world through love.* Consequently, the church is inherently both ethical and missional. This means that its mission in and to the world is not something secondary or optional, but is constitutive of the church's very essence. In this final section of the chapter we will explore some implications of a relational conception of ecclesiology for the church's engagement in and for the world.

1.   The church participating in Christ's priestly ministry

As ambassadors of reconciliation

All Christian ministry is properly *Christ's* ministry, in which Christians participate by the Holy Spirit. As a relational community, the church engages the world by participating in Christ's priestly ministry as ambassadors of reconciliation. A priest is someone who stands between God and other human beings and plays a mediatory role of representing God to people and representing people to God. A priest also has the task of making atonement on behalf of the people before God, thus reconciling the people with God. Strictly speaking, in the New Testament Christ alone is the great High Priest who makes atonement for human beings once and for all. Yet the church, as God's reconciled people reconstituted as the Body of Christ, participates in Christ's priestly ministry by God's grace and in the Spirit's presence and power. In this ministry, the church itself does not accomplish atonement on behalf of others (Christ has already done this), but in its "I, yet not I—but Christ" existence (Gal 2:20) it ministers "in Christ" and seeks to

point people to Christ. The church is not the unique Mediator between God and human

beings, but by the Spirit the church participates in Christ's ministry of mediation before

the Father and thereby serves Christ as his representative in the world.[75]

> In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes:
>
> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5:18–21).

In this passage Paul makes two sets of claims, one set concerning God and the other

concerning Christians. With respect to God, he tells us that God has given us new life and

that Christ made this gift of new life possible. In what theologians have often called "the

great exchange," God made Christ who had no sin to be sin for us so that we could

become God's righteousness. As Paul explains elsewhere, our old sinful self died with

Christ so that we could rise again with Christ to new life by sharing in his resurrection

(Rom 6). Moreover, God did not just stand by and watch from a distance but was "in

Christ" reconciling people to Godself. Consequently, God no longer counts peoples' sins

against them. With respect to Christians, Paul says that we are now Christ's ambassadors

of reconciliation. As such, we have been commissioned to proclaim the good news that

Christ has achieved reconciliation and to urge people to respond by turning to God to

experience this reconciliation and receive new life in Christ. Thus, one of the ways that

the church is called to engage the world is by being ambassadors of reconciliation in

proclaiming the gospel and teaching people how to begin a saving relationship with God.

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75. This priest metaphor should not be pressed to the point of giving the impression that God is not active in people outside of the Christian community until the Christian shows up to mediate between them. Christ as High-Priest the is Mediator between all human beings. Christians are called to the special task of sharing explicitly in Christ's ministry.

The church does not accomplish this by its own power and ingenuity, but in and through

the power of God's Word and Spirit. Just as God was "in Christ" reconciling the world to

Godself, so God is now "in Christians" blessing their ministry of reconciliation with

God's own presence and power by the Holy Spirit.

As the church for others

Another way that the church participates in the priestly ministry of Christ is by

living sacrificially for others in the world. As Bonhoeffer argued, the church does not

exist merely for itself; the church also exists for others. By its very constitution as an

exocentric entity, Christ's church is a "church for others." Bonhoeffer's notion of the

"church for others" arose from his fervent and disciplined meditation upon the mysteries

of the Incarnation and Crucifixion of Jesus.[76] As he contemplated the full divinity and

humanity of Christ, he realized that Jesus's weakness and suffering in finite, bodily,

human existence was the supreme expression of the victory and supremacy of God. In his

Incarnation, life, death, and Resurrection, Jesus demonstrates that the true nature of both

God and humanity (in the *imago Dei*) is being-there-for-others.[77] Thus, Bonhoeffer refers

to Christ as the "man for others." In his Outline for a Book, Bonhoeffer writes:

> It is only this "being there for others," maintained till death, that is the ground of
> his omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. Faith is participation in this
> being of Jesus (incarnation, cross, and resurrection). Our relation to God is not a
> "religious" relationship to the highest, most powerful, and best Being
> imaginable—that is not authentic transcendence—but our relation to God is a
> new life in "existence for others," through participation in the being of Jesus. The
> transcendental is not infinite and unattainable tasks, but the neighbour who is
> within reach in any given situation. God in human form—not, as in oriental

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76. For a fuller treatment of Bonhoeffer's notion of the church for others, see my article "Bonhoeffer's Missional Ecclesiology." *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 9 (2007–2008): 116–17, 121–25.

77. Jens Zimmerman notes that Bonhoeffer's stress on solidarity with others, especially "the least of these" (Matt 25), has deep roots in patristic theology. See his essay, "Being Human, Becoming Human: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christological Humanism," in *Being Human, Becoming Human: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Social Thought*, ed. Jens Zimmermann and Brian Gregor (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 33.

religions, in animal form, monstrous, chaotic, remote, and terrifying, nor in the conceptual forms of the absolute, metaphysical, infinite, etc., nor yet in the Greek divine-human form of "man in himself," but "the man for others," and therefore the Crucified, the man who lives out of the transcendent.[78]

Since the church's being and mission are created and defined by the being and mission of Christ, the fact that "Jesus is there only for others" implies that "The church is the church only when it exists for others . . . Its mission is to tell men of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others."[79] It accomplishes this mission by *being* the reconciled and free community of Christ and by *proclaiming* and *embodying* the gospel as it engages the world. It is crucial that the church not just proclaim the message (important as that is); it must also *be the message* by embodying it in its own life. As God's ambassadors Christians are called to represent God both in their speech and in their actions. As Bonhoeffer points out in his discussion of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus does not tell his disciples that they merely *possess* salt and light for the world as an instrument for their mission. Jesus says that his disciples *are themselves* salt, light, and city on a hill (see Matt 5:13–16).[80] Together, they are the community that seeks to love God transparently with all that they are—heart, mind, soul, and strength—and that strives to love their neighbours as themselves. Accordingly, Jesus tells them to let their good deeds shine in the darkness of the unbelieving world. In so doing the church becomes, as Lesslie Newbigin puts it, a "living epistle" and an active and concrete "hermeneutic of the gospel."[81] As such, it becomes an important sign, instrument, and foretaste of the kingdom of God for its surrounding culture. This notion of the "church for others" as a

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78. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 381–82.

79. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 382–83.

80. Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 111–13.

81. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 227–32; *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (London: SCM, 1957), 51.

living "hermeneutic of the gospel" is a fruitful one in the context of contemporary postmodern societies. Since most people in Western culture today possess very little knowledge of the Bible and of basic Christian doctrines, their only experience of genuine Christianity is likely to be their encounters with Christians from local congregations. Thus, a congregation of men and women, who believe, embody, and enact the gospel in their everyday lives, provides culture with the lens though which it can begin to interpret and understand the message of Christ.

Theology of the cross as a model for cultural critique and the proclamation of justice

The Apostle Paul wrote that in Jesus Christ God reconciled all things to Godself by making peace through Christ's blood, which was shed on the cross (Col 1:19–20). God's own ministry of reconciliation secured our forgiveness and restoration, not by a mere whim but at the tremendous cost of the cross.[82] Miroslav Volf observes that forgiveness involves two essential elements, one negative the other positive.[83] Negatively, forgiveness involves condemnation of a wrong committed. In saying "I forgive you, Johnny, for stealing twenty dollars from my wallet," I am not simply excusing Johnny's actions as insignificant to me, trivial, or morally neutral (even if his stealing is in some sense understandable, for example if he needed the money for food). Rather, I am condemning his actions as morally wrong and naming myself as having been wronged by him. Positively, forgiveness involves releasing the offender from the debt incurred by his wrongful action(s). It means forgoing one's desire for vengeance and one's right to retribution, though it does not rule out reformative discipline and a measure

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82. Bonhoeffer conveys this point brilliantly in the first chapter of his *Discipleship*.
83. Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 129–31.

of restitution.[84] Indeed, God disciplines those whom God loves and expects us to make things right with others when we sin. A biblical example is Zacchaeus, who not only acknowledged his sin and received Christ's forgiveness but also vowed to give half of his wealth to the poor and to payback those he had defrauded four times what he had stolen from them (Luke 19:1–10). Just as the act of forgiving involves these two essential elements, the act of receiving forgiveness also involves two parallel essential elements: acknowledging the just condemnation of one's wrongful action(s) and receiving the gift of release from debt from the person whom one has wronged.[85]

The two essential elements of forgiveness mentioned above constitute not only human forgiveness but God's forgiveness as well. In fact, from a Christian perspective, human forgiveness is grounded in, modeled after, and made possible by God's prior work of atonement and forgiveness through the mediation of Christ in the power of the Spirit.[86] In forgiving human beings, God names and condemns sin *and* offers release from the debt of sin on the basis of Christ's atoning work on the cross. The cross represents both God's condemnation and God's forgiveness of human sin; it is both God's *NO* and God's *YES* to sinful human beings.[87] By the cross, God condemns all human injustice, oppression, alienation, exploitation, and moral corruption—at the personal, social, and global levels. Yet the cross also embodies God's forgiveness and grounds God's invitation to human beings to receive God's love, acceptance, transformative grace, and

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84. The forgoing of retribution accounts for the fact that restitution alone cannot undo past actions and in many occasions cannot sufficiently compensate for wrongs committed. Indeed, sometimes an infinite gap separates restitution from full compensation, as when the wrong committed is murder.

85. Volf, *Free of Charge*, 153–54.

86. See Volf, *Free of Charge*, 131–51.

87. I am here drawing on the language of Bonhoeffer (who is, in turn, drawing on the language of Barth). Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott, vol. 6, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 252–52, 262, 291,

thereby to enter into God's new life in the Spirit. It demonstrates God's initiative in the process of reconciliation and calls human beings to respond in repentance and enter into true freedom.

"When Christ calls a man he bids him 'come and die.'"[88] A theology of the cross equips the church to engage the world by speaking and doing the truth in love.[89] It entails a radical commitment to following Christ whatever the cost. It can thus serve as a helpful model for fruitful cultural critique and transformation (we will also consider incarnation and resurrection as models of cultural engagement in chapters 7 and 8 respectively).[90] Cross-bearing involves means of witness that may not be well received by the dominant culture or its leaders. Examples in Jesus's ministry include: his confrontations with religious and political leaders, which threatened the privileged status quo of the powerful and empowered the lowly; his experience of being rejected by crowds, his home town, religious and political authorities, and even friends; his confrontation of practices that were good for business but oppressive for people (e.g., clearing the temple; see also Paul's confrontation of the selling of idols and superstitious relics); and his exposure of hypocrisy and hard heartedness.

A theology of the cross applied to the church's mission calls the church to seek justice in the world, which involves condemning injustice and immorality *and* actively

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88. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 89.

89. See also Vanhoozer's discussion of cruciform performance in *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 428–39.

90. John W. de Gruchy notes that Bonhoeffer's cultural engagement incorporated reflection on the Incarnation, Cross, and Resurrection. See his essay, "Dietrich Bonhoeffer as Christian Humanist," in *Being Human, Becoming Human: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Social Thought*, ed. Jens Zimmermann and Brian Gregor (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 19. For example, in *Ethics* (pp. 157–59), Bonhoeffer rejects a dichotomous choice between radicalism and compromise in his discussion of cultural transformation. Instead, he argues for a threefold approach to cultural engagement pattered after Jesus's incarnation (God's love and affirmation), cross (God's judgement), and resurrection (God's purposes for the new creation). I am taking my initial cue from Bonhoeffer in following this pattern.

pursuing peace—thereby fostering forgiveness and reconciliation. The church is called to seek justice in the lives of individual human beings by calling them to repentance and by sharing the message of God's love and forgiveness. It is called both to condemn the actions of perpetrators and to seek to restore them to relational wholeness and moral integrity before God and their fellow human beings. The church is also called to seek social justice and cultural transformation. As Volf writes, "As the Gospel has been preached to many nations, the church has taken root in many cultures, changing them as well as being profoundly shaped by them."[91] The cross symbolizes both God's *YES* and God's *NO* to human culture. Consequently, the cross entails both an affirmation of the goodness in every culture but also "*a judgment against evil in every culture.*"[92] As Volf writes, "There can be no new creation without judgment, without the expulsion of the devil and the beast and the false prophet (Revelation 20:10), without the swallowing up of the night by the light and of death by life (Revelation 21:4; 22:5)."[93] Christ makes his home in every culture but Christ cannot be domesticated by any. The church must therefore cultivate discernment and the willingness to critique cherished cultural norms, values, expectations, and worldviews that are incompatible with the teachings of Jesus. This includes evaluating and addressing broad social issues, such as nationalism, ethnocentricity, and economic injustice. It also includes evaluating and addressing the influence of culture on the concrete, daily lives of individuals and their choices, including the culture's perspective on moral issues (e.g., concerning money, sex, and power), its notion of success or 'the good life,' its attitude toward the poor, the homeless, the sick, and the oppressed, and its support of religious and personal freedom. Moreover, it will

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91. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 51.
92. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 52.
93. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 52.

evaluate and address the cultural impact of media on the worldviews and values of people, especially young people who are so easily and pervasively influenced by its content. Finally, the church will condemn institutional, systemic, governmental, and legislative injustice, and advocate instead for the rule of righteousness, justice, love, and peace within these important and potentially life-supporting and culture-forming entities.[94] At the same time, a theology of the cross emphasizes personal engagement and care, sacrifice, graciousness, humble service, and solidarity with those in need. This is in contrast to a theology of glory, which tends to rely on and promote privilege, human charisma, and an approach to leadership and influence characterized by paternalism and triumphalism (e.g., prosperity gospel and many Christendom models).[95] In short, the church will seek to engage the world as Christ did, both by lovingly condemning evil and by casting a compelling vision of what genuine human life together in the kingdom of God is really like.

2.   Means of engagement

There are many ways in which the church can live out its calling to engage the world as ambassadors of reconciliation for Christ. A congregation's specific missional calling is not something that can be decided in advance by devising abstract objectives or by applying pragmatic methods or formulaic techniques. Genuine worldly engagement

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94.   In chapter 9, I argue that the model of theological anthropology and ecclesiology developed in this dissertation leads to an endorsement of Niebuhr's 'Christ the transformer of culture' type. See H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001). However, I qualify and nuance Niebuhr's type to incorporate the threefold witness of cross (calling culture and government to account, which sometimes includes resistance and withdrawal), incarnation (affirming the legitimacy of culture and government and our need to engage and become involved), and resurrection (creatively and in God's power calling culture and government to see and embrace the possibilities of the new creation).

95.   In addition, Douglas John Hall proposes that only a theology of the cross takes the ambiguities, uncertainties, and sufferings of the world seriously; accordingly, only a theology of the cross offers a hope that is true and profound enough to replace the national philosophies of optimism, which are essentially naive and escapist theologies of glory. See John Douglas Hall, "The Changing North American Context of the Church's Ministry," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 22, no. 6D (1995): 409.

depends on theological vision and worldview, combined with spiritual discernment, wisdom, passion, creativity, and a willingness to step out in faith and take risks at God's initiative. Here I will offer just three brief suggestions, and refer the reader to other helpful resources in the footnotes. First, churches can engage the world by considering and discerning what God is doing and then joining in and participating in God's work.[96] One of the ways a church can do this is by finding out what its members are already doing in their daily lives, perhaps identifying patterns and commonalities, and then acting to encourage and support them in it. For example, has someone initiated a Bible study or a book club in their neighbourhood? Does someone coach a sports team or volunteer as a big brother or big sister? Is someone in a position of leadership in a business and so able to influence and mentor others? Does someone have a passion to start a ministry of reaching out to the elderly in a local home, but lacks resources or confidence to do it? The local congregation can ask how it can support its members in each of these situations, if nothing else through prayer and encouragement but potentially also by joining the person in helping them with expressed needs for volunteers, resources, or theological and spiritual guidance and wisdom.

Second, a church can engage the world by sharing in the burdens of its local community.[97] One of the reasons that the early church had such a profound impact on its surrounding culture was that it engaged others in radical acts of hospitality, care, and solidarity. Christine Pohl writes, "Early Christian writers claimed that transcending social

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96. This basic idea comes from Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994).

97. For some good resources on this theme, see: Robert and Julia Banks, *The Church Comes Home: Regrouping the People of God for Community and Mission* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997); Lois Y. Barret, ed., *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); and Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shape of Things to Come: Innovation and Ministry for the 21st Century Church* (Peabody: Publishers, 2003).

and ethnic differences by sharing meals, homes, and worship with persons of different

backgrounds was proof of the truth of the Christian faith."[98] She argues that hospitality,

as a fundamental *human* practice, always included family, friends, and influential

contacts. "What made hospitality distinctly Christian, however, was the emphasis on

including the poor and neediest, the ones who could not return the favor."[99] For example,

the early church Father John Chrysostom stressed the importance of being proactive in

giving hospitality and encouraged his parishioners to make a guest chamber in their

house for 'Christ' (i.e., the maimed, beggars, and homeless).[100] In addition to active

hospitality, Alan Kreider argues that the early church impacted its culture through its

"question-posing ways of addressing common problems in society."[101] Examples of this

include the early church's novel practice of adopting unwanted babies that were

discarded in the garbage dumps of the Roman Empire (many of these babies were girls,

which is one of the reasons that the proportion of females in Christian communities was

unusually high), its practice of providing free burials for all, including the poor (in a

culture in which only the rich typically received the honour of burial), its practice of

loving enemies in concrete actions of care, and its response to disease and plague

whereby (in contrast to most people who fled in fear) Christians regularly put themselves

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98. Pohl, *Making Room*, 5.

99. Pohl, *Making Room*, 6.

100. Pohl, *Making Room*, 45, 70.

101. Alan Kreider, "They Alone Know the Right Way to Live: The Early Church and Evangelism," in *Ancient Faith for the Church's Future*, ed. Mark Husbands and Jeffrey P. Greenman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 172. Throughout the article Kreider mines early church literature in order to answer two questions. First, what accounted for the explosive growth of the early church, especially considering the fact that it did not seem to place much emphasis on 'evangelism' in the modern sense (also, because it was persecuted it often had to gather privately and act inconspicuously)? Answer: Its perceived spiritual power, its question-posing behaviour due to Christian convictions and values, and its common life together as resident aliens. Second, what practices formed and sustained the early church to be such a community? Answer: Its distinctive practices of worship and catechesis.

at risk to care for the sick and diseased.[102] In light of these observations, it would be helpful to ask: what concrete things can local churches do to reach out to their communities in hospitality and in solidarity?

Third, local congregations can engage the world by forming partnerships with others who are seeking justice, reconciliation, and peace. These others might include other local church congregations who are open to partnering together to impact the local community. It might include partnering with social justice organizations, perhaps beginning with those that a congregation's own members already support or serve as volunteers. It might include getting to know the local police, school teachers and principals, hospital workers and officials, and municipal government representatives, in order to discern the needs of the community in partnership with those who have a pulse on particular aspects or issues within the community.[103] Finally, in light of the church's global mandate, worldly engagement ought to include some form of partnership with mission organizations and approved non-governmental organizations that are working for justice, peace, and truth across the globe.

3.   Conclusion: Living out of love in an egocentric world

Our contemporary world is full of lonely, alienated, hurting people, who are deeply longing for genuine, life-giving relationships with God and other human beings. The church exists to minister to all such people and to invite them to share in its communal life. As relational communities of the new humanity the church exists to serve the mission of the triune God, who by the Holy Spirit draws alienated human beings into

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102. Kreider, "They Alone Know," 172–74.

103. For some helpful ideas for engaging political leaders and processes in the Canadian context, see: Brian C. Stiller, *From the Tower of Babel to Parliament Hill: How to be a Christian in Canada Today* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1997), 185–88, 199–202.

life-giving relationships with God and other human beings by incorporating them into the

Body of Christ. Just as God created human beings to be exocentric, other-centred

persons, so the Holy Spirit similarly constitutes the church to be an exocentric "church

for others" that serves God's mission of reconciliation in the world. The church is

inherently missional because it is—first and foremost—inherently relational.

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Chapter 7:
The Church as Rational Communities of Faith

A.   Introduction

In chapter four I described the human being as a rational creature drawn to participate in the intelligible conversation of the Trinity by sharing in the divine *Logos*. This participatory sharing enables human beings to pursue their *telos*, part of which includes knowing God and understanding God's created world. However, human sinfulness creates an impediment to the human's ability to know God, which distorts a genuine understanding of God's creational purposes in and for the world. Sin causes a breakdown in the human being's participation in the intelligible divine conversation and leads to the captivity of the human mind, which I described as a mind turned in upon itself, alienated from and hostile to God. Consequently, human redemption in Christ involves renewal of the mind and restoration to the divine conversation, leading to a life of wisdom characterized by faith and godly living. It is crucial to see, however, that Christians do not cultivate godly wisdom and character on their own; rather, Christians cultivate wisdom and character with the help of their brothers and sisters in Christ in God's family. Moreover, the cultivation of Christian wisdom is not merely a rationalistic endeavour but is pursued by faith within the social context of the church, which is the historical People of God. Thus, the identity, history, traditions, and practices of the church are important for Christian wisdom formation.

This chapter depicts the church as rational communities of faith. As rational communities of faith, church congregations exist to encourage their members toward growth in their knowledge of God and God's purposes, to impart wisdom for understanding God's will for human life and flourishing, and to foster character

formation through its community life, ministries, mentoring, discipling, and practices.

This aspect of the church guards against mere conformity, groupthink, or manipulation by

powerful leaders. As a rational community, the church's goal is not to manipulate or

coerce conformity or obedience, but to equip and form people with wisdom to make the

right decisions. Moreover, the church exists to serve God's mission of exhorting the

broader world toward wise living. It does this by modelling wise living in its own

communal life, by advocating for wise and godly social norms, structures and laws, and

by affirming, impacting, and directly contributing to the wise functioning of cultural

influences and leaders (e.g., in business, politics, health care, education, media, etc.). As

such it acts as a social catalyst for wisdom and as leaven for godly social transformation

in a posture of humility, graciousness, peacefulness, and sacrificial and redemptive love.

It should be noted that this chapter builds upon the relational view of the church

articulated in the previous chapter, but to avoid redundancy and to conserve space I will

not continually repeat important themes already established there. Thus, for example, in

the present chapter I will assume that the church ministers on the basis of its union with

Christ in the Spirit and thereby participates in the ministry of God. I will refer to these

themes, but not explain them again. I point this out here because discussing the church as

a rational community without discussing its union with Christ by the Spirit could lead to

a rationalistic ecclesiology, which is something that I am not advocating.

B.   Inner community life of the church

1.   Faith and the church as the People of God

In chapter four we observed that Christian wisdom combines rationality with

ethical living and that a key ingredient holding rationality and ethical living together is

faith.[1] Thus, by faith people live rationally and ethically, in accountability to God as responsible creatures before God, and this amounts to wisdom. In parallel to this, the church is a rational-ethical community devoted to the cultivation of wisdom. New members gain access and join the community through faith in Jesus Christ, which means that the church is fundamentally a community of faith. One of the ways that the New Testament portrays the church as a community of faith is by its description of the church as the new "People of God." The first letter of Peter relies heavily on terminology associated with the concept of "God's people." For example, it describes the community of those "who believe" as "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, . . . the people of God" (1 Pet 2:7, 9, 10; notice the link between belief, holiness, and being God's people). The epistle never employs the term 'church' (ekklesia) to refer to God's people but instead uses images such as God's house/temple (2:5), God's flock (5:2) and God's family (4:17). These images carry Old Testament connotations of Israel's privileged position as God's chosen people.[2] Peter deliberately applies these images to his readers, along with the title 'People of God,' so that by faith they would identify themselves with historic Israel.

The phrase 'People of God' was a highly significant description of the church for the early Christians and remains important for the present church's historical continuity

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1.   As Bonhoeffer and Kierkegaard both stressed, "Faith is not merely a cognitive relation of assent to correct doctrine but is rather a whole-person response to the call of Christ. Faith is inseparable from the obedient response of following after Christ in concrete, everyday existence." Brian Gregor, "Following-After and Becoming Human: A Study of Bonhoeffer and Kierkegaard," in *Being Human, Becoming Human: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Social Thought,* ed. Jens Zimmermann and Brian Gregor (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 153.

2.   I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 653–54. Other closely related image include "braches of the vine," which is a symbol of Israel that Jesus applied to his disciples in John's Gospel, and "the saints," which is tied indirectly to the Old Testament notion of a holy remnant of God's elect people. See Marshall, *New Testament Theology,* 523 and Walter Schmithals, *The Theology of the First Christians,* trans. O.C. Dean, Jr. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 154–55.

with the Old Testament covenant community.[3] George Ladd explains that it conveys the

idea of standing in a special covenant relationship with God and implies that the church is

God's new covenant people.[4] However, in contrast to the Old Testament notion of the

People of God, which was built upon the covenant that God made with Abraham and then

Israel, the new People of God is based upon *God's covenant with humanity through Jesus*

Christ and is radically inclusive. It includes persons from every tribe, language, people,

and nation who have been purchased with the blood of Christ (Rev 5:9). Thus, the church

as God's new humanity is defined by faith in the Messiah and King, in and through

whom it is bound together and toward whom its future is directed.[5] While individuals

were often assumed to have entered the Old Testament People of God by virtue of their

birth, the New Testament specifies that it includes persons of diverse origins and

backgrounds who join the church through *spiritual rebirth*. This is not to deny the

existence of pagan 'saints' in the Old Testament who were not ethnic Jews yet had a

relationship with God (e.g., Ruth, who joined the covenant people) nor to deny the

possibility of ethnic Jews violating the covenant and ceasing to be part of the People of

God (e.g., Ahab, Jezebel).[6] True faith had always been crucial for a right standing and

relationship with God, though many failed to understand this. As Paul points out, "not all

who are descended from Israel are Israel" (Rom 9:6).[7] It is simply to affirm that God

made the covenant with Israel in particular, though the covenant had a worldwide salvific

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3.   Schmithals, *Theology of the First Christians*, 153.
4.   George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 582–83.
5.   Marshall. *New Testament Theology*, 123, 338.
6.   It is important to stress that God had always cared about more people than just ethnic Israel (e.g., Ruth, Rahab, Job, Melchizedek, the Ninevites, etc.).
7.   There had always been a faithful remnant, a true and believing people within the larger society who trusted God's promises and acted accordingly (Gal 3).On this point, see Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 338.

goal that would be attained through Christ and completed at the eschatological gathering

of all the saints. It is important for the church to remember its continuity with the people

of Israel in past, present, and future (Rom 9–11) and to celebrate and treasure its history.

As Marshall emphasizes, the church is not merely an existential event or a continual

'happening' but is rooted in salvation history.[8] As the historic new People of God,

believers enter the church by faith alone and sustain the life of the church (in part) by

faithful remembrance and celebration of its place in salvation history, through its

engagement with Scripture (Old and New Testaments), its worship and liturgy, and its

traditions and practices (including the sacramental ordinances).[9] This emphasis on the

church's history does not imply a preoccupation with the past leading to a stale

traditionalism. Rather, the church's rootedness in the past, combined with its

eschatological hope for the future, should equip and empower it with the resources,

confidence, and ingenuity it needs to pursue its life and mission in the present as it

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8.   Marshall. *New Testament Theology*, 173. This raises the question of the church's relation to
ethnic Israel. While this is a broad and complex subject, for my present purposes I will simply state that
there is both discontinuity and continuity in the transition from old to new covenant, from Israel to the
church (see Marshall. *New Testament Theology*. 123–25, 338, 453–54, 668). On the one hand, the new
covenant is in fact new. Jesus's intention was to inaugurate a new era, and his choice of twelve disciples,
symbolic of the twelve tribes of Israel, meant that the old era had become obsolete. Not only is this second
covenant new. but according to the writer of Hebrews it is also superior to the old covenant both
quantitatively and qualitatively. In Christ we are guaranteed a "better covenant" (Heb 7:22), because: (1)
Christ is superior to the angels in power, authority, and as one who reveals the glory and being of God (Heb
1:1–4); (2) Christ is superior to Moses, because while the latter was a faithful servant in God's house Christ
is the faithful son (Heb 3:1–6); and (3) Christ's priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood, because
human priests die and are succeeded but Christ lives forever to make incessant intercession for us and
because Christ's sacrifice was offered once-for-all and is infinitely efficacious (Heb 7:11–27). On the other
hand, there is only one kingdom of God. The church does not simply replace Israel, as if God has forsaken
his people or forgotten his promises. Rather, believing Israel finds its true identity and future in the church
(Rom 9–11; Gal 3; Eph 2:14–18).

9.   One of the crucial ways that Dietrich Bonhoeffer differed from many of his contemporaries in
Germany during the Second World War was his continued engagement with the Jewish Scriptures (i.e. the
Old Testament), which the Nazi church discounted and dismissed. For examples of Bonhoeffer's
interaction with the Old Testament, see especially *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis
1–3*, vol. 3 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. John W. de Gruchy, trans. Douglas Stephen Bax
(Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997) and *Prayerbook of the Bible: An Introduction to the Psalms*, vol. 5 of
Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, ed. Geffrey B. Kelly, trans. James H. Burtness (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996).

participates with the Spirit (who continually draws it toward perfection or completion). Neither nostalgia for the past nor dreaming about the future should characterize the church, but rather faithful improvisation in the present that is inspired by the past, oriented toward the future, and guided by the Word and Spirit of God.

2. Communities of faith that cultivate wisdom

According to the New Testament, the church is called to teach and exemplify wisdom (Eph 3:10; Jas 13:13–18). Paul says we proclaim Christ, "admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ" (Col 1:28). Accordingly he instructs the Colossian believers to "teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts" (Col 3:16).[10] Wisdom enables believers in the church community to know God better (Eph 1:17), understand God's revealed salvation purposes (1 Cor 2:7–16; Eph 1:17; 3:10–11; Rev 13:18; 17:19), and be more effective witnesses for Christ (Luke 21:14–16; Acts 6:9–10). Wisdom is also an important quality for faithful and effective leadership in the church (Acts 6:3; 1 Tim 3:2). In addition, the New Testament's emphasis on instructing and modelling the teachings and character of Christ (in accordance with the Scriptures) highlights the importance of wisdom for Christian communities (John 17:17; Rom 15:3–5; 1 Cor 4:16; Phil 2:5–10; Col 3:16; 1 Tim 4:6; 2 Tim 3:14–17).[11] Given the importance of wisdom, it is no wonder that the Apostle James counsels that anyone who lacks wisdom should ask God for it (Jas1:5). But what kind of wisdom does Scripture promote? And what is the character of

10. For a helpful treatment of the importance of song a formative aspect of Christian worship, see James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom. Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 170–73.

11. See also Daniel J. Treier, *Virtue and the Voice of God: Toward Theology as Wisdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 50, 53.

distinctly *Christian* wisdom? Two biblical emphases attend to these questions: Christian

wisdom comes from God and must be distinguished from 'worldly' wisdom.

Wisdom comes from God

As observed in chapter four, the Old Testament teaches that genuine wisdom

begins with fear of or reverence for the Lord and becomes manifest in lives that are lived

in the light of God's purposes and will. Daniel Treier summarizes that wisdom in the Old

Testament involves divine communication (wisdom mediates God's presence in creation

through both general and special revelation; e.g., Psalm 19), which is appropriated in a

community for its people to enjoy life, is characterized by their fear for God, and

accordingly promotes shalom amongst God's people.[12] I also pointed out in chapter four

that while fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of wisdom it is not the *end* (final purpose) of

wisdom and does not fully account for its content and character. According to the New

Testament the purpose of genuine wisdom, as revealed in the person and ministry of

Jesus Christ, is to love God and fellow human beings more deeply and serve God and

others more knowledgably and effectively. Consequently, Jesus's love command

summarizes the entirety of the Torah and the prophets (Matt 22:40; Gal 5:14) and is at the

heart of Christian wisdom. As Treier says, Christian practical reasoning (one aspect of

wisdom) "has its pattern in Christ and thus its animating principle is love."[13] Such love is

not merely a human possibility, but comes from God and indwells us personally by the

Spirit (1 John 3:16; 4:7–10, 13, 16–17).

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12. Treier, *Virtue and the Voice of God*, 44–45. Treier points out that the notion of shalom nicely synthesizes the connection between wisdom, the order of creation, and worldly success. He writes, "For Proverbs success means, preeminently, shalom; riches, honor, physical security, family, and the like are derivative. . . . Proverbial 'life' remains ambiguous about the particular shape it will take for a wise person. This means, moreover, acknowledging God's sovereign freedom to grant life rather than assuming an automatic, bluntly casual, domino effect between wisdom and success." (p. 45)

13. Treier, *Virtue and the Voice of God*, 52.

Jesus's own ministry was characterized by profound wisdom, full of love and knowledge (Matt 12:42). Those who encountered him found his wisdom captivating, shocking, refreshing, and liberating—except for the self-promoting religious teachers and authorities.[14] The New Testament declares that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Jesus Christ (Col 2:3). Since it is closely associated with God's own love and knowledge, which comes to us through Christ by the Spirit, genuine human wisdom is a gift from God (Jas 1:5; 2 Pet 3:15). It is both a natural gift, in which all human beings are invited to participate and grow, and a special gift that the Spirit uniquely gives to particular people (and communities) in various degrees to edify the church (Rom 12:8; Eph 4:11–13; Col 1:9; 4:16). It is also given to impart knowledge to the church about God's salvation plan, which in former days was secret but now is revealed through Christ in the Spirit (1 Cor 2:7–16; Eph 1:17). As a gracious gift from God, genuine wisdom is not something about which a person should arrogantly boast, but receive with gratitude and humility with the intention of serving God and others (1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 1:12; Col 2:23).

Worldly wisdom versus godly wisdom

The New Testament contrasts false or distorted wisdom that comes from "the world" with genuine wisdom that comes from God. Before explicating this distinction it is important to clarify what the New Testament does not mean, and therefore does not condemn, when it speaks of wisdom that is "worldly" or "of the world." First, wisdom of the world does not refer to knowledge about the created world.[15] As Treier notes, the

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14. See: Matt 7:28–29; 13:54; 22:15–22; Mark 6:2; Luke 2:40, 52; 21:14–16; John 1:1–5, 9; 5:36–40; 6:68; 14:6–7.

15. See also Treier, *Virtue and the Voice of God*, 41. Treier observes that creaturely life and wisdom are interwoven in the book of James and points out several similarities between James and Proverbs 3.

wisdom literature of the Bible is closely associated with knowledge about creation and about how the world generally works, which is precisely what grounds its value and relevance for stable and successful living.[16] Second, worldly wisdom does not refer to the knowledge or behaviour of non-Christians simply by virtue of their being non-Christians. Wisdom literature personifies wisdom (e.g. Prov 8) and depicts it as calling out to all who are willing to hear and response to its message. Wisdom mediates God's presence within creation and is both transcendent and immanent, both inaccessible and accessible. As Treier observes, "Wisdom calls (Prov 1–9), but humans must respond (Prov 10–31). In fact, the givenness of Wisdom is what invites human seeking that, by fearing YHWH, will find. . . ." Consequently, "This Wisdom clings to YHWH, albeit somehow connected as well with what is cosmically consistent, with what would be successful even for other cultures. . . ."[17] Third, by extension, worldly wisdom does not refer to advanced learning or academic scholarship, such as that conducted at major universities (secular or Christian) in the arts, sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Rather, all truth is God's truth. Such learning, if it represents a genuine pursuit of truth, participates in God's wisdom as it studies what Calvin referred to as God's "book of nature."

What then is the "wisdom of the world" that Scripture condemns? The two New Testament texts that contrast worldly and godly wisdom are 1 Corinthians 1–2 and James 3:13–18. According to these texts, false worldly wisdom glorifies individual human beings by drawing attention to their own knowledge, ingenuity, strength, and eloquence. Paul says that worldly knowledge "puffs up" and is opposed to love, which "builds up" or edifies (1 Cor 8:1). Characterized by pride and selfish ambition, its tendency is to breed

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16. Treier, *Virtue and the Voice of God*, 33.
17. Treier, *Virtue and the Voice of God*, 35.

bitter envy, disorder, and every kind of evil. Accordingly, James calls false wisdom earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. Elsewhere the New Testament associates false wisdom with disobedience (Luke 1:17) and associates it with worldly structures and regulations that disregard God's grace in Christ (Col 2:23). Moreover, worldly wisdom depends on knowledge that is deliberately sought autonomously from God and applied in opposition to God's purposes and plans for human beings and creation.[18]

In contrast, distinctly Christian wisdom is, first of all, cruciform in nature. It is wisdom that corresponds to the message of the cross and points in humility to the power of the cross rather than to human glory and knowledge. As such, it is not condescending or patronizing, seeking to bring others under the sway of its own rhetoric and intelligence; rather it seeks to encourage, edify and build others up according to God's truth and purposes. Thus, Paul says that God called him to proclaim the gospel "not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power" (1 Cor 1:17) but to "proclaim Christ crucified" (v. 23) because "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength" (v. 25). Accordingly, Paul determined to preach "not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power" so that the faith of his hearers "might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Cor 2:4, 5). Second, wisdom from God involves acceptance of God's revelation, especially God's plan to save us in Christ. Paul says that he declares God's wisdom, which is "a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began" but now has been revealed by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:7, 10). Third, wisdom from God involves spiritual discernment, which is granted

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18. Treier observes that knowledge and morality sought autonomously and in opposition to God is what characterizes the false wisdom that Adam and Eve pursued in the Garden of Eden (Treier, *Virtue and the Voice of God*, 38–40).

by the Holy Spirit who searches the deep things of God and gives us access to the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:10–16). Fourth, wisdom that comes from God sometimes seems like foolishness to those who do not know God and who disregard God's purposes and saving plan (1 Cor 1:21–25, 27–29; 1 Cor 2:14). It thus requires trust in God and a pure heart that seeks affirmation primarily from God rather than from other human beings. Fifth, godly wisdom goes beyond the possession of knowledge and skills (though it includes these) and is defined also in relation to appropriate attitudes and results. In terms of attitudes, James tells us that wisdom from above is pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere (Jas 3:17). In terms of its results, genuine wisdom manifests itself through the good deeds that one performs in humble service to God and others (Jas 3:13). Genuine wisdom is therefore a quality that characterizes a person's whole existence. One does not merely *possess* wisdom; rather, one determines to *become a wise person* by cultivating gradually and with discipline the kind of attitudes, patterns of thought, commitments, habits, and virtues that make one wise.[19] In light of these observations, churches should strive to be communities that cultivate in their members wisdom that is cruciform, knowledgeable of God's Word and saving work, sensitive to the Holy Spirit (spiritually discerning), confident in God's moral truth and priorities, and embodied holistically and pervasively in godly character and holy living.

3.   Ministries of the church that cultivate godly wisdom

Our contemporary culture is in dire need of people characterized by depth and wisdom. Many are seeking a greater sense of profundity and spiritual transcendence in

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19.   Joseph J. Kotva, Jr., *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996), 17–37.

Eastern religions such as Buddhism (or watered down versions of them). They long to

find greater meaning than what is offered by a culture wrapped up in materialism and

pragmatism. Within Christianity, one of the reasons why many people are drawn to the

Emerging Church and other postmodern expressions of church (though some are also

migrating to Catholic, Anglican, or Orthodox traditions in order to recover pre-modern

roots) is that they have become disenchanted with the intellectual and spiritual

superficiality that they observe in modern evangelical churches.[20] They are particularly

turned off by seeker sensitive models, which they believe reduce the mysteries of the

faith and the complexity of theological and intellectual issues to slick slogans and tips for

self improvement. Noted Christian scholars have also criticized the tendency toward anti-

intellectualism within the evangelical movement.[21] For example, the respected

evangelical historian Mark Noll refers to the "scandal of the evangelical mind," which he

describes not simply as failure to think but more fundamentally as a failure to integrate

Christian faith with advances in human knowledge across the academic disciplines.[22]

Similarly, Richard Hughes laments that many Christian academics fail to think

20. Tony Jones, *The New Christians. Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 109; Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church· Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003, 13–14, 25, 94. 114, 203; Brian McLaren, *More Ready Than You Realize. Evangelism as Dance in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 52; Scott Bader-Saye, "Improvising Church: An Introduction to the Emerging Church Conversation," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 6, no. 1 (2006): 18–20. See also George Barna, *Revolution* (Carol Streem: Tyndale House, 2005). Barna forecasts a dramatic change in the American religious landscape in coming decades, as increasing numbers of devout Christians pursue and express their faith without attending conventional churches.

21. Jens Zimmermann doubts that the North American evangelical subculture (including its institutions of learning) is prepared to re-engage the life of the mind creatively and profoundly as it engages contemporary culture. One of the main reasons for this its lack of historical awareness, including a lack of rootedness in its own traditions. He writes, "the recovery of a passionate intellect and a purpose for education requires a grasp of one's history and identity which comes through knowing one's tradition. The sap of a tree comes from its roots. . . . Yet the evangelical subculture reveals its greatest weakness precisely at this crucial point." See his article: "The Passionate Intellect: Christian Humanism and University Education," *Direction* 37 (Spring 2008): para. 20. Online: http://www.directionjournal.org/article/?1505.

22. Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

theologically about the meaning of the Christian faith; though highly educated, they remain "at a Sunday school level of theological literacy." Consequently, they either struggle to relate their faith to their academic life and work or else they maintain a dichotomous separation of faith and learning, which threatens the overall coherence and consistency of their vocation as Christian scholars.[23] Fortunately the situation has been improving dramatically since Noll wrote his book; Evangelicals are making noteworthy contributions in all academic fields and many are increasingly emphasizing an interdisciplinary approach to scholarship and learning.[24] Nevertheless, it is crucial to continue to emphasize the importance of the life of the mind within the contemporary evangelical movement. A view of the church as rational communities of the new humanity attends to this. Such communities rationally embody the historic Christian tradition (i.e., MacIntyre's notion of community as an extended argument) and prioritize cultivating people who are characterized by the cumulative and thus historically embedded wisdom offered by that tradition. By participating in such communities believers are equipped to *think Christianly*, to *think theologically* from a Christian perspective, about every aspect of life.

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23. Richard T. Hughes, *The Vocation of a Christian Scholar How Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 6.

24. See for example: Deane E. D. Downey and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Christian Worldview and the Academic Disciplines. Crossing the Academy* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009); Kelly Monroe Kullberg, ed., *Finding God at Harvard Spiritual Journeys of Thinking Christians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997) and *Finding God beyond Harvard: The Quest for Veritas* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006). See also the American Scientific Affiliation (online: http://www.asa3.org/) and its academic journal *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, the Canadian Scientific and Christian Affiliation (online: http://www.csca.ca/), the C. S. Lewis Foundation (online: http://www.cslewis.org/), the Regent College Marketplace Institute (online: http://www2.regent-college.edu/marketplace/), and the Veritas Forum (online: http://www.veritas.org/).

Wisdom cultivation through theological formation

One crucial way of cultivating wisdom is through theological formation. The theological formation of believers in the church has to do primarily with the accumulation of theological knowledge and the development of a coherent Christian worldview.[25] Regarding theological knowledge, congregations have the responsibility to teach their members about the Bible, key doctrines, and important aspects of the congregation's particular theological tradition, as well as important aspects of the historic Christian tradition (for example, the definitive early creeds, knowledge about the Reformation, the Great Awakening and Wesleyan revival, the development of Evangelicalism, etc.). Evangelicals might find an emphasis on learning about history and tradition odd, but, as writers such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and Stanley Hauerwas have convincingly demonstrated, a sense of narrative or historical contextualization is fundamental to the establishment and maintenance of identity—both for individuals and communities (see chapter 1). Such knowledge of the Bible, doctrine, and tradition should be taught on at least three levels. The first level concerns facts. This level includes learning basic information, definitions, concepts, and key names and places (e.g., major prophets and apostles; the cities to which the New Testament epistles are addressed; key theological figures, such as Athanasius, Irenaeus, Tertullian, the Cappadocians, Augustine, Anselm, Hildegard of Bingen, Aquinas, Julian of Norwich,

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25. Since I am discussing theological knowledge in particular, it is appropriate to use the term 'worldview.' By using this term, I am not endorsing a rationalistic or individualistic approach to faith and knowledge (see my footnote # 47 in chapter 1 on Charles Taylor's distinction between 'worldview' and 'social imaginary'). In chapter 8, I emphasize holistic character formation, which includes worldview but goes beyond it to include the role of tradition, narrative, rituals, and practices in the context of community for the cultivation of both intellectual and moral virtues. Combining these two emphases (worldview and the social embodiment of worldview in traditions) leads to an integrative approach, which acknowledges the formative role of Charles Taylor's 'social imaginaries.' See Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). See also James K. A. Smith's discussion of social imaginaries in *Desiring the Kingdom*, 65–71.

Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Catherine Booth).[26] The second level concerns contexts and the application of facts therein. For example, knowing that God created the heavens and the earth in six days is factual knowledge. Knowing that the creation account was addressed to a specific group operating with a functional ontology in the Ancient Near East is contextual knowledge. Knowing that the writer was encouraging his audience to worship Yahweh alone and to serve as Yahweh's steward-priests is an application of the relevant facts interpreted in context. The third level concerns learning to recognize principles and patterns in Scripture (patterns involve such things as analogical comparisons, typological trends, and hermeneutical lenses). Returning to the example just given, a principle might be that our role as steward-priests of Yahweh leads us to think and behave in ways that are different from those who do not follow Yahweh, such as valuing the intrinsic dignity of all people who are created in God's image. An example of a pattern is to notice the significance attributed to the offices of King and Priest (as well as Prophet) in the Old Testament, leading to their fulfilment in Jesus Christ and finally their reapplication to Christians who share in Christ's ministry as steward-priests of the new creation. Doctrines and traditions can similarly be taught in this multileveled way of exploring facts, contexts, principles, and patterns. To employ a literary analogy: factual knowledge is like learning letters and words; contextual knowledge is like realizing that words appear in sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and sections; knowledge of principles is like understanding advanced grammar; and knowledge of patterns is like learning to identify genre, narrative, and plot. The

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26. The stories of godly and influential women in the history of the church are often neglected or ignored, which is something that we should remedy. For a helpful source on the importance and impact of women in the historic Christian tradition, see Ruth A. Tucker and Walter Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Academie/Zondervan, 1987).

salient point is that accumulating Christian knowledge involves not just memorizing and regurgitating information, but also reflection, analysis, creative engagement, and an ability to integrate what one is learning with concrete situations in one's own life. Churches can provide such teaching in a variety of formats, including preaching (which aims to demonstrate and model such learning), catechism classes (in preparation for Baptism), teaching seminars, Sunday school or study classes, small groups led by capable leaders, or through learning opportunities resulting from partnerships with seminaries (e.g., public lectures, colloquiums, conferences, and satellite classes hosted at local churches that members can audit).

The accumulation of knowledge is not an end in itself but aims toward worldview formation and wise living. Worldview formation involves shaping peoples' basic convictions in accordance with ultimate reality and the relation of human beings to it. This includes, first, shaping fundamental convictions about the identity and character of the trinitarian God and God's dealings with humanity (such as are included in the Apostles', Nicene, and Chalcedonian creeds). It includes, secondly, shaping fundamental convictions about human beings as God's creatures, which I have depicted in this dissertation as relational, rational, and eschatological creatures to whom God relates as Reconciler, Creator, and Transformer. This also includes fundamental convictions about the human *telos*, three aspects in particular: loving God and other human beings, knowing God and understanding God's created world, and serving God and others as steward-priests of creation. It involves, thirdly, enabling a theological grasp of the salvation narrative that recognizes its four great plot movements: (1) God created the world and human beings to be good; (2) human sin distorts the created goodness of human beings

and the natural world; (3) in and through Jesus Christ all things are reconciled, redeemed, and restored (though human participation in this involves a faith response); and (4) the Holy Spirit is drawing all things that are reconciled in Christ toward eschatological fulfillment and final perfection in glory.[27] Fourth, it involves shaping fundamental convictions about what constitutes a genuine and satisfying human life. Finally, it involves shaping fundamental convictions about where one finds trustworthy and authoritative teaching concerning what constitutes a genuine and satisfying human life.[28] For Christians, such teaching is found primarily in Scripture, interpreted with the aid of tradition, reason (in both rational and empirical forms), and the illumination, guidance, and experience of the Holy Spirit.

In addition to gaining theological knowledge and developing a Christian worldview grounded in vital basic theological convictions, believers also need the church to equip them to *think theologically*. Many people in the contemporary church who hear the word 'theology' react negatively, immediately thinking of anxious and uptight people engaged in highly abstract and theoretical debate over obscure issues and minor details. Others simply equate theology with doctrine and assume that theological study concerns

27. For the overall structure of the biblical salvation narrative, see also: Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1984), part 2 (chapters 3–5); Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), chapters 2–4; and Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), chapters 3–4.

28. Walsh and Middleton suggest a slightly different approach, based on the following four questions (*The Transforming Vision*, 35): (1) Who am I? Or, what is the nature, task and purpose of human beings?; (2) Where am I? Or, what is the nature of the world and universe in which I live?; (3) What's wrong? Or, what is the basic problem or obstacle that keeps me from attaining fulfillment?; (4) What is the remedy? Or, how is it possible to overcome this hindrance to my fulfillment? Dallas Willard suggests the following four worldview questions, each of which Jesus answers: (1) What is reality? (God and God's kingdom); (2) Who is truly well-off or blessed? (Anyone who is alive in the kingdom of God); (3) Who is a really good person? (Anyone who is pervaded with love); and (4) How do you become a really good person? (You place your confidence in Jesus Christ and become his student or apprentice in kingdom living). Dallas Willard, *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge* (New York: HarperOne, 2005), 50–55.

memorizing and regurgitating doctrinal statements and positions. Sometimes such views

about theology are justified. Too often there is a disconnection between the church and

the world of academic theology, a problem that goes in two directions. On the one hand,

theologians sometimes forget that their calling is to serve the church. Instead, they focus

on their academic careers and dedicate their energies to making contributions to their

professional field without drawing out the relevance of their work for the church or the

lives of Christian believers. Consequently, theology becomes an abstract academic

discipline to which regular church-going people cannot relate. On the other hand,

sometimes the problem lies with churches. Sometimes churches forget that their ministry

and mission are theological in nature. Such churches end up operating with unexamined

cultural assumptions and values, such as pragmatism, consumerism, and worldly notions

of success. Consequently, they begin to resemble secular organizations or corporations

and lose their prophetic voice and Christian distinctiveness. Young pastors entering these

churches after seminary find that their theological and pastoral training is regarded as less

valuable than their ability to run programs efficiently and lead the church 'successfully'

(often equated with numerical growth). So they become absorbed in church business and

lose interest in maintaining current theological competence and knowledge. Their own

theology becomes rote and outdated, which affects their teaching in one of two ways.

One possibility is that they simply neglect teaching theology altogether, which results in

unreflective teaching that ends up reinforcing cultural values and assumptions rather than

addressing them critically.[29] Another possibility is that they occasionally address

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29.   Stanley Hauerwas reflects that "when a sermon is thought to be no more than a speech by the
minister to provide advice to help us negotiate life, the content of sermons usually are exemplifications of
the superficial and sentimental pieties of a liberal culture." See *A Cross-Shattered Church: Reclaiming the
Theological Heart of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 19.

theological topics, but then fail to integrate theology with everyday life and the pressing issues that contemporary people are facing. Such preaching confuses the regurgitation of doctrine with thoughtful and contextual theological engagement; hence it fails to facilitate the cultivation of wisdom and intensifies the sense that theology is stuffy, boring, and irrelevant.

The overall effect of the academic–pragmatic theological dichotomy is that a distinctly Christian worldview becomes stifled and exerts less and less influence on the daily thinking and living of Christians. In contrast to this dichotomy, the church needs to exhort and equip *all Christians* to think theologically. Thinking theologically involves the accumulation of theological knowledge and the development of Christian worldview as discussed above, but it also involves a conscious effort to reflect in a disciplined way about *all of life* in light of Christian truth. The goal of theology is to enable Christians to know God more deeply and coherently, to help them develop characteristically Christian (and biblical) patterns of thought and evaluation, to guide them in living lives that correspond to God's character and purposes, and to equip them to share their knowledge of God with others accurately, effectively, and humbly (in bearing witness or evangelism, edification, instruction, and correction). In this sense, *every Christian should be a theologian.*

Pastors are charged with the special task of equipping Christians in their congregations to think theologically.[30] This requires that pastors themselves continually

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30. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 447–48. In Vanhoozer's dramatic analogy, pastors and elders are charged with the task of "directing the company" of actors. The church needs discipline and direction in order to perform the Scriptures faithfully. Doctrine provides such direction, but doctrine must be instructed. Such instruction takes place primarily through the sermon. Pastors and elders serve as assistant directors (to the Holy Spirit) to help people understand the play (the theo-drama) and grow into their parts. This involves helping people see their identity as being in Christ, learning the 'script' (the

seek to grow in their theological knowledge and competence through ongoing theological study and awareness of contemporary theological developments. Staying up-to-date is important, not in order to be theologically trendy, but because theology is inherently a dynamic enterprise that develops and shifts as it attempts to relate the knowledge of God to developments in human learning and experience. Sometimes theology can seem irrelevant because pastors rely on outdated theological knowledge and training to address complex contemporary issues, hence they address them inadequately (e.g., the origins of human life debate). Or sometimes reliance on outdated theology makes pastors ignorant of contemporary developments in human knowledge, which leads to the dismissal or avoidance of pressing contemporary issues and concerns facing congregants (e.g., current issues in bioethics, such as reproductive or genetic interventions). In contrast, pastors should strive always to grow in theological wisdom, which involves continual growth of their knowledge of God and their knowledge of the world. Perhaps an apt and helpful analogy for the 'pastor as wise theologian' is the role of a physician or medical doctor. Medicine is a practice that involves a mixture of 'bedside manner' or daily down-to-earth involvement with everyday people, practical skills in diagnosing and treating medical problems, mastery of theoretical knowledge about human anatomy and biology, and ongoing education with respect to new discoveries and developments in the medical field. The best physicians relate well to people, have mastered medical knowledge and key skills, and stay up-to-date with contemporary medical advances. In a similar way, the pastoral role as a *theological call* involves practical involvement in the lives of real

Bible), and understanding how to perform it faithfully in the contemporary context. "What the pastor/director really needs to do is take the congregation's imagination captive to the Scriptures so that the theo-drama becomes the governing framework of the community's speech and action (2 Cor 10:5). The pastor/director needs to instil confidence in a congregation that *this* script is the way to truth and abundant life." (p. 448)

people, the ability to use acquired skills effectively (e.g., skills required for effective

pastoral care and counselling, preaching, mentoring, etc.), the mastery of biblical and

theological knowledge, and continuing education leading to an awareness of advances in

the study of theology and its related disciplines (e.g., practical theology, ethics,

apologetics, etc.).

While we should regard all Christians as theologians in some sense, and pastors

even more so, there remains a crucial need in the church for people with a special call and

giftedness to study and teach theology—theologians proper. Advanced theological study

and practical involvement in concrete ecclesial life are mutually enriching. As Daniel

Treier writes,

> The call for every-believer theologizing does not trivialize the word 'theology,'
> but heightens responsibility. Nor does that call deny the special gift or office of
> teaching the church, in which the intensity of discernment—and usually of
> engagement with scholarship—is heightened. However, the difference concerns
> degree, not kind.[31]

The unique task of professional theologians is to study at an advanced level the sources

of Christian theology—Scripture, tradition (including doctrine and history), reason

(rational and empirical knowledge), and religious experience (of the Spirit of God)—and

to make the fruit of their study relevant to and fruitful for the church. Such advanced

study is most likely to be relevant and fruitful when theologians care deeply about the

church and are aware of its pressing needs, are committed members of a local

congregation, and are involved in ministry at some level (anything from helping

ministries to hospitality to teaching). Theologians impact the church positively when they

share the fruit of their study with others, for example by teaching pastors at seminaries,

by speaking at conferences and seminars for pastors and lay people, by writing books that

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31.   Treier, *Virtue and the Voice of God*, 90.

help people grow in theological competence, and by contributing to the theological formation and education of their congregations.

Wisdom cultivation through constitutive and formative practices that shape the mind

Within the church Christians also cultivate wisdom as they participate in the church's constitutive and formative practices. First, they cultivate wisdom by participating in the church's constitutive practices of the Word and the sacramental ordinances. Through the ministry of the preached Word, believers receive theological and practical instruction in the Christian faith. Preachers should aim not simply to disseminate theological information or, at the other end of the spectrum, to offer theology-light practical self-help tips for successful living. Rather, preachers should aim to increase their congregation's knowledge and understanding of God and God's purposes, shape their basic convictions and worldview accordingly, and help them narrate their lives in light of Scripture.[32] The latter involves helping people to see their own place in God's overarching story, which addresses them personally and reorients their lives, so that they can improvise upon it faithfully and wisely under the guidance of the indwelling Holy Spirit.[33] In addition to hearing and being shaped by the preached Word, individual Christians cultivate wisdom as they study Scripture together—by reading and analyzing it, meditating and reflecting upon it, and engaging with it practically by sharing how it addresses them personally, applies to their lives, and challenges them to grow.

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32. On the theme of narrating our lives by the story of Scripture, see Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 9–12, 50–52, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001), 47–61; 101–3, and *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 99–100.

33. Treier argues that Scripture does not "provide a complicated and comprehensive calculus for scientific, topical application to every judgment. Rather, Scripture and its derivative healthy teaching are to form us wisely as Christian persons and communities, enabled by the Spirit (within certain commanded boundaries) to discern how the 'logic' of the gospel fits particular circumstances." Treier, *Virtue and the Voice of God*, 54.

Through the practice of the sacramental ordinances, Christians develop wisdom as they remember and symbolically re-enact the ministry and saving work of Jesus Christ. Such acts of remembrance continually ground the church's life in the life of Christ and guide its ongoing life and ministry.[34] For example, to encourage his readers toward faithful Christian living, the apostle Paul reminded them of their Baptism and exhorted them to live in accordance with their new resurrection life in Christ (Rom 6:3–6; Col 2:12). At the Last Supper, Jesus shared bread and wine with his disciples as symbols of his body and blood, which he would soon sacrifice for the sake of sinners. He told them "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19) and thus initiated the meal of remembrance that the church celebrates as the Lord's Supper. In addition to grounding the life and ministry of Christians in Christ, the sacramental ordinances also unite them to the historic Christian church (the church practiced both Baptism and the Lord's Supper from the beginning of its existence, though their status as formal sacraments developed over time).[35] When Paul instructed the Corinthians about celebrating the Lord's Supper properly he revealed that he was passing on to them the tradition that he himself had received, a tradition that went back to Christ (1 Cor 11:23). Paul discussed not just proper order for the Supper, but also its implications for genuine Christian life and community (1 Cor 11:27–34). In summary, the sacramental ordinances remind Christians of Christ's saving work and encourage them to live out the implications of their salvation in how they think, minister, and share life together.

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34. Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 160. See also Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 410.

35. Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness. The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 152–53.

Second, the church also helps Christians to cultivate wisdom as they participate in the practice of worship. As mentioned in the previous chapter, worship is a broad topic encompassing all of Christian life; as James K. A. Smith argues, "worship is at the heart of being human."[36] One of the aspects of worship that is often neglected in contemporary churches is its formative function in shaping Christian thought and life. Yet a fundamental component of worship in the Bible concerns its role in shaping the beliefs and actions of God's people as they rehearse God's Word (e.g., God's Law and promises) and celebrate God's mighty acts in salvation history (especially the Exodus in the Old Testament and the Christ event in the New Testament).[37] There are many examples of rehearsing God's Word and celebrating God's saving deeds in the Psalms. The New Testament similarly includes hymns and worship scenes, which rehearse and celebrate God's character and saving activity in Christ and encourage believers toward specific beliefs, attitudes, and actions in the present (e.g., Phil 2:5–11; Rev 4–5). There is a connection in Scripture between whom or what one worships and the kind of person one is becoming. It seems that God intends worship to be something that aligns people to God and conforms their character and actions to God's own. As Smith puts it, "Worship is the ordering and reordering of our material being to the end for which it was meant."[38] Unfortunately, the alignment mechanism can work in the opposite direction as well: false or distorted worship shapes people in negative ways, often very subtly.[39] As N. T. Wright puts it,

> You become what you worship. When you gaze in awe, admiration, and wonder at something or someone, you begin to take on something of the character of the

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36. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 166.
37. See, for example, Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old & New* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).
38. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 143.
39. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 23, 85–88, 93–101, 103–18, 121–26.

object of your worship. Those who worship money become, eventually, human calculating machines. Those who worship sex become obsessed with their own attractiveness or prowess. Those who worship power become more and more ruthless.[40]

One of the reasons why idolatry is so disastrous is that it aligns and conforms people to

what is distorted or evil. For instance, Palm 115:4–8 suggests that those who make idols

become like them (i.e., without sense, lifeless) and Jeremiah criticizes the Israelites who

"worshiped worthless idols, only to become worthless themselves" (Jer 2:5). While

contemporary Westerners are unlikely to worship idols in the form of literal statues or

images, they are constantly invited to give themselves over to forms of idolatry that are

subtler yet equally insidious (perhaps even more so), such as consumerism, nationalism,

or political correctness.[41] True worship aligns people with the truth; false worship aligns

them with illusion and distortion and amounts to idolatry.[42] Genuine Christian worship is

crucial to the development of true wisdom in believers, both as a practice of formation in

the way of Jesus and one of counter-formation against the ways of the world. As Alan

Kreider reminds us concerning the early church,

> The churches' worship services were not designed to be evangelistic. Nor were their services designed to move the hearts of the worshipers. The churches' acts of worship rather were designed to glorify God and to form the worshipers into

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40. N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 147–49.

41. James K. A. Smith provides an intriguing discussion of how several contemporary secular institutions and practices actively seek to form and shape peoples' desires and allegiances, often operating under the facade of neutrality or pragmatism. He seeks to expose the way in which such institutions and practices operate as subtle (often operating at sub-conscious or pre-cognitive level) yet deeply formative liturgies, which strategically train people to think and feel in certain distinct ways (e.g., inferiority for lacking some product) and thus direct their love and energy toward certain ends (e.g., purchasing the product to address the lack). Smith argues that these liturgies lead people into false worship or idolatry, which Christian worship must correct through "counter-formation." Examples of such secular liturgies include 'the mall,' 'the military entertainment complex' (professional sports), and the university as a 'cathedral of learning.' See Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 89–129.

42. For an extended treatment of this theme, see G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

attractive, intriguing disciples of Jesus Christ and their congregations into communities that embodied the way of Jesus.[43]

Churches would do well to reflect carefully about how they are shaping people in worship. For example, worship that caters to consumer tastes and is devoid of theological content will reinforce consumerist patterns of thought and behaviour. Whatever style and form worship takes, the salient point is that churches need to be intentional and diligent about what its worship service is communicating, teaching, and embodying.[44] Worship is a wonderful experience, something people often enjoy; it is a great opportunity to teach and shape people with solid theological content, whether through song, poetry, prayer, responsive readings from Scripture and the creeds, or meaningful and intentionally crafted artistic expressions and symbolic acts.

Third, the church helps Christians to cultivate wisdom by encouraging them to participate in spiritual disciplines that form healthy habits of thought and action. In order for spiritual disciplines to be effective in cultivating wisdom, churches need to instruct their members on the purpose of such disciplines (e.g., Matt 6). It needs to be clear that spiritual disciplines are not meritorious actions that automatically earn God's favour, although practicing them properly can generate awareness of God's presence and providence. Accordingly, Jesus told his disciples not to babble on like the pagans when they prayed. God is not impressed with fancy words chanted repeatedly; God already knows one's needs and wants to be addressed with simplicity and sincerity (Matt 6:7–8). Moreover, the spiritual disciplines do not of themselves make Christians holier or more

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43. Alan Kreider, "They Alone Know the Right Way to Live: The Early Church and Evangelism," In *Ancient Faith for the Church's Future*, ed. Mark Husbands and Jeffrey P. Greenman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 185–86.

44. Kevin Vanhoozer writes, "Worship is ritualized theology; theology is reflective worship" (*The Drama of Doctrine*, 410). Thus, the quality of a congregation's worship reflects quality of its theology.

righteous. They are not necessarily morally valuable in and of themselves, though they are often closely tied to moral goals. For example, the discipline of simplicity can help people attend to what is most important in their lives and lead to better stewardship of time, money, and resources. The discipline of fasting can help people become aware of their dependency on God and increase their gratitude to God. In addition, practicing a spiritual discipline should not draw the attention of others to oneself, but rather increase the intensity of the practitioner's attention to God (Matt 6:5–6, 16–18). Some examples of spiritual disciples that help Christians cultivate wisdom include meditation, study, and receiving guidance from other Christians.[45] In addition, the discipline of prayer helps Christians to be attentive to God and thus grow in wisdom. Thus in his prayer for the Ephesians, Paul prays that God would give them spiritual wisdom and understanding to know God better and to discern God's purposes for their lives (Eph 1:16–23). Meditative prayer and contemplative prayer are particularly important in this regard, as is persistent prayer for God's specific guidance in one's life.[46] Prayer also leads to wisdom by helping believers grow in faith and trust in God (recall the connection between faith and wisdom). As they bring their lives before God in prayer, believers come to God in a spirit of humility and surrender, bringing their needs and concerns to God and waiting expectantly for God's provision and guidance in their daily lives.

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45. For a helpful discussion of these spiritual disciplines, see Richard J. Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline. The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978). See also the helpful discussion of "listening prayer" in Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 459—64.

46. See Richard J. Foster, *Prayer. Finding the Heart's True Home* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

Wisdom cultivation through wise leadership

The scope of this chapter precludes a full discussion of leadership structures in the church, but I do want to comment briefly on the kind of leadership that is implied by the notion of the church as a rational community of faith. Regardless of the specific ecclesial leadership structures churches have in place, all should emphasize the importance of wisdom, maturity of character, and a desire and commitment to lead by serving and equipping others.[47] Leadership is not about promoting mere conformity to authority or rule-following; it is about raising others up into maturity of faith and wisdom and preparing them for ministry in the church and mission in the world. Even Paul, despite his being an apostle instilled with great authority, was inclined to persuade and exhort the congregations rather than giving outright commands (consider the care and effort he takes in crafting his letters to help readers anticipate the ethical implications of the gospel). In terms of essential leadership qualities, the New Testament places an immense emphasis on wisdom: leaders should be characterized by wisdom and godly character and seek to cultivate the same qualities in others. Leaders should therefore be humble, morally upright and trustworthy, knowledgeable of Scripture and theology (able to teach), self-disciplined in their own affairs with their priorities properly aligned, mature in the faith, and have a good reputation in the church and broader community (1 Tim 3:1–12).

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47. Authority in the early church was exercised by leaders who led by example and through service. Their leadership was not authoritarian in nature, but was always a derivative of Christ's ultimate authority, hence church leaders acted as stewards of Christ's authority. They were called and gifted for their task by the Holy Spirit. There seems to have been flexibility and diversity in the leadership structures of the church, however those who were called to be apostles, prophets, teachers, elders, and shepherds had primary leadership responsibilities (but we must be careful not to import anachronistic notions of 'leadership' back into the New Testament). See Schmithals, *Theology of the First Christians*, 170, and Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, 760–62.

C.   The church engaging the world

1.   Participating in Christ's prophetic ministry

As witnesses and servants of the truth

As rational communities of the new humanity, the church is called not only to cultivate wisdom among its members but also to influence the world toward wise living. Of course, the two are intimately connected: as the church cultivates wisdom in its members it is thereby preparing them to influence the world. Consequently, everything in the previous section about cultivating wisdom in the church is relevant to the church's engagement with the world. Wisdom enables Christians to prioritize what is truly valuable, to make the best of their time, money, and resources, to develop healthy and satisfying friendships, to enjoy their marriages and experience God's blessing and guidance as they raise children. None of this comes automatically. Wisdom calls, but people must listen and respond with diligence. Moreover, the pursuit of wisdom is not a lonely venture, but one that places people in a community that is dedicated to pursuing wisdom together and accordingly offers teaching, encouragement, guidance, and accountability. When duly cultivated and confidently lived out, such wise living is attractive to the surrounding world and thus strengthens the Christian community's witness and maximizes its impact in influencing the world. Accordingly, Jesus instructs the community of his disciples to let their light shine brightly, so that everyone will see the quality of their God-infused life and give praise and glory to God (Matt 5:16).

As the church lives out the life of wisdom in the midst of the world, it participates in Christ's prophetic ministry as witnesses and servants of the truth. Of the many things that prophets do in Scripture, two things stand out for the purposes of the present

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discussion: prophets *proclaim* and *demonstrate* God's truth to the world, often in compelling and even provocative ways. Similarly, the church is called to proclaim and demonstrate God's truth to the world. It is important to emphasize that the church does not accomplish this merely by its own intelligence, ingenuity, and strength, but is called to pursue its mission actively and confidently as it participates by the Spirit in Christ's own prophetic ministry in the world. We will briefly consider what it means to proclaim the gospel in the present section and subsequently consider what it means to demonstrate the truth of the gospel in the next section.

Proclaiming the gospel means publically declaring the explicit content of the Christian good news that Jesus Christ is Lord and King, that a new kingdom is at hand and is coming in fullness and permanence, and that Christ invites us to enter a new way of life in his eternal kingdom. In his 'Great Commission,' Jesus instructed his disciples to "go and *make disciples* of all the nations, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and *teaching them to obey all the commands I have given you*," and then he assured them "and surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt 28:19–20; emphasis added). Three insights from this passage are instructive concerning the church's mission of proclamation. First, proclaiming God's truth involves making and baptizing disciples of Jesus Christ. The church's ministry of proclaiming the truth in the world includes not just teaching the world how to live better, or how to be more successful, or how to achieve personal self-fulfillment and prosperity. Ultimately, the church's ministry of proclamation aims for worldview transformation or what Scripture calls 'conversion.'[48] As a religion, Christianity is unique in that it does not just

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48. I think this is what Stanley Hauerwas is getting at when he says that the church's primary task is not to make the world 'just' but to make the world 'the world.' In other words the church, as an alternate

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offer answers and solutions to life problems that come from a great teacher; rather, Christianity's great teacher and Lord *is himself the answer*. The teachings of Jesus are unique not because they are novel and totally different from the wisdom offered by other religions and philosophies (there are both close similarities and vast differences between the teachings of Christianity and other world religions and philosophies). The teachings of Jesus are unique because of who Jesus is. Jesus himself claimed: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). As the incarnation of the *Logos* of God, Jesus Christ uniquely and authoritatively embodies the presence, mind, and character of God (John 1:1, 14, 18; Col 1:15). This claim is consistent with orthodox Christology, which maintains that Christ's person and Christ's work are intimately and indissolubly linked together.[49] Christian wisdom claims knowledge of the truth and boldly proclaims the way to life only because Jesus Christ is himself the truth and the way to eternal life. As the disciple Peter responded after hearing some of Christ's difficult teachings and being asked if he would desert Jesus as many others were, "Lord, to whom would we go? You alone have the words that give eternal life. We believe them, and we know you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68–69). Christian wisdom coincides with natural knowledge derived from creation, but it makes comprehensive sense only when one sees and acknowledges that Jesus Christ is Lord. Consequently, the church's call to proclaim the truth involves evangelism.

Second, while proclaiming the truth aims at conversion it also involves more than evangelism. It involves training disciples and teaching them all that Christ instructed. It is

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community or *polis* in allegiance to a different Lord, calls the world to make a fundamental choice about Jesus. See, for example, Hauerwas, *In Good Company*, 19–21, 251, and *Christian Existence Today*, 101–3.

49. Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 2007), chapters 11 and 13.

significant that the Great Commission appears at the end of Matthew's gospel rather than at the beginning. Appearing at the end, the commission presupposes everything that precedes it in Matthew's gospel, including all of Jesus's teaching, the intimate time Jesus spent with his disciples in mentoring them, the 'on-the-job' missionary training the disciples received as they followed Jesus and joined him in ministry, and the difficulties they encountered along the way (e.g., confrontations with religious and political leaders). The majority consensus of New Testament scholarship is that the central theme of Jesus's proclamation in the synoptic gospels is the kingdom of heaven/God.[50] In light of this, the full meaning of Jesus's Great Commission in context is to "go and make *kingdom disciples or apprentices*." Consequently, Christian proclamation aims not merely to win new converts but to enlist, instruct, mentor, and train apprentices of Christ's kingdom life, so that they too become servants of the kingdom and agents of the new creation (chapter 8 takes up this theme in more detail). Moreover the instruction to baptize new believers in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit indicates that proclaiming the gospel involves introducing people to a whole new kind of life. Baptism indicates death to one life and rebirth into another (Rom 6). It also involves joining in community with others who are pursuing and living out the new kingdom life in a comprehensive and holistic way.

Third, Christ promises to be with the church as it pursues its ministry of proclaiming the truth. Christ's presence imbues the church with Christ's own prophetic authority and power to teach and demonstrate the truth. As Jesus makes clear, "All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me. *Therefore*, go and make disciples . . .

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50. See Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 19.

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." (Matt 28:18–19a; emphasis added). The church is not itself the ultimate authority of truth; the church's authority is a derivative authority that is contingent upon its faithfulness to Christ and Christ's teachings. In addition, Christ does not simply leave the church alone to fulfill its mission, but promises to be present and involved as the church actively seeks first the kingdom of God. Christ's promise in the Great Commission assures the church that when it pursues its mission it does so not merely by its own strength and wisdom, but in the power and presence of its active and living Lord, Jesus Christ.

Incarnation as a model for demonstrating truth in the church's engagement with the world

Jesus not only proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom; he also demonstrated its presence and power by his character and actions. Jesus did not just preach the gospel; his whole life embodied it. When John the Baptist sent Jesus a message asking him if he was the Messiah, Jesus responded: "Go back to John and tell him about what you have heard and seen—the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor" (Matt 11:4). By responding in this way, Jesus was not evading John's question but was essentially saying "Yes! And here's the proof . . . so be confident!" Jesus responded not just with words and arguments, but by pointing to his own actions as a compelling demonstration of the dawning kingdom and *thus* to his status as Messiah and King. However, Jesus's ability to demonstrate the gospel and the kingdom was dependent upon a prior and more fundamental event, namely the Incarnation. In order to reach out to the world and to demonstrate the kingdom of God, Jesus first came into the world to dwell among us. God

did not merely send us yet another messenger to give us a new law. God the Son became human and entered into our existence in order to relate to us intimately and show us *in person* what kingdom life is really like. "The Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father" (John 1:14). Since God became incarnate in order to demonstrate to us in person the good news of the kingdom, the Incarnation can serve as a model for the church as it engages its culture and world to demonstrate God's truth.

The Incarnation as a model of cultural and worldly engagement emphasizes three principles. First, an incarnational model requires the church to go out into the world, rather than always expecting the world to come to the church. This reflects the sending model of God's own redemptive mission to save humanity: "For God so loved the world that he *sent* his one and only Son" (John 3:16; emphasis added). Accordingly, Jesus became incarnate and went forth into the world to proclaim and demonstrate the good news. Jesus repeated the pattern with his own disciples. When Jesus called them to follow him, he told them that he would "send" them out to "fish for people" (Mark 1:17). Later, as he apprenticed his disciples, Jesus sent them out in pairs into the mission field for training (Mark 6:7). He instructed them to pray that God would send more workers into the harvest field (the world) to reach people with the gospel (Matt 9:38; Luke 10:2). In his Great Commission, the Risen Jesus reiterated the sending model by commanding his disciples to *go out* and make disciples of *all nations* (Matt 28:19). The Gospel of John similarly records the Risen Jesus telling his disciples, "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you" (John 20:21). And again, in Acts 1:8, the Risen Christ reaffirms the

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church's mandate to go out into the world, saying: "You will be my witnesses in

Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Engaging the world relevantly does not mean endorsing a 'seeker model' of

church. Rather, it means being a church that equips believers *to be sensitive seekers* as

they go out into the world to seek and reach others with the love and truth of Christ.[51] It

does not entail being an 'attractional' church, which devises worship services and

programs to satisfy the needs of religious consumers who (hopefully) come through its

doors.[52] Rather an incarnational model involves forming believers *to lead attractional*

lives that are characterized by the wisdom of God and model a way of living according to

God's purposes and priorities in their whole existence in the world. As Marva Dawn

nicely puts it,

> We gather together in worship to speak our language, to read our narratives of
> God at work, to sing authentic hymns of the faith in all kinds of styles, to chant
> and pour out our prayers until we know the truth so well that we can go out to the
> world around us and invite that world to share this truth with us. In our worship,
> we are formed by biblical narratives that tell a different story from that of the
> surrounding culture.[53]

Second, an incarnational model involves reaching people by forming

relationships. It especially supports approaches to evangelism and witness that are

personal and relationship-building rather than mechanistic or impersonal. Throughout his

ministry Jesus took time to relate to people, care for them as individuals, and minister to

them in intimately personal ways such as pronouncing the forgiveness of their sins (e.g.,

Mark 2:5), giving specific spiritual advice or counselling (e.g., Nicodemus in John 3),

and delivering many individuals from sickness, disease, blindness, paralysis, and

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51. Kreider, "They Alone Know," 185–86.
52. Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shape of Things to Come: Innovation and Ministry for the 21st Century Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 17–59, 157–58.
53. Marva J. Dawn, "Worship to Form a Missional Community," *Direction* 28 (Fall 1999): 141.

demonic oppression. Granted, Jesus also addressed large crowds, so we should not dismiss large scale evangelistic efforts out of hand; evangelism needs to take place at multiple levels and contexts (large groups, small groups, one-on-one; close friends, associates, and strangers). Nevertheless, Jesus prioritized investing time and effort to reach and train a small group of disciples (especially the twelve) so that they could, in turn, do the same and achieve growth that is exponential, deeply transformative, and sustainable in the long run (see also Paul's encouragement to Timothy in 2 Tim 2:2). In addition, an incarnational model patterned after Jesus commits churches to reaching not only people who are just like them but also people who are quite different, including those who are marginalized or looked down upon by the world. Examples of this in Jesus's ministry include his ministry to the Samaritan woman and her community (John 4), his practice of eating with sinners and tax collectors (e.g., at the homes of Levi and Zacchaeus), his deliverance of those caught in adultery or prostitution, and his outreach to lepers and other untouchables (i.e., those deemed unclean by the religious authorities). Like Jesus, a church with an incarnational approach to worldly engagement will deliberately form its members to invest themselves in the lives of people with whom they come into contact, regardless of their social background or status, to share and enact the gospel.

Third, an incarnational model encourages the church to recognize and form bridges of mutual understanding and agreement wherever they can be found, in order to enter into further dialogue in the pursuit of truth. There are several ways that Christians can build bridges with others, but for now let us consider just three. First, Christians can find common ground with the beliefs of others in order to articulate the uniqueness of

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Christ in a relevant, gracious, and humble way. Examples of this in the New Testament

include the Gospel of Matthew's portrayal of Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy

(see also the book of Hebrews) and Paul's speech at Athens to those who worshipped an

unknown god (17:16–34).[54] This approach reflects Paul's overall apologetic strategy of

becoming "all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some" (1

Cor 9:22). Second, because the Incarnation affirms the intrinsic value of creation, which

includes human bodily existence (see chapter 4 section B.4 and chapter 5 section D.1),

Christians can find common ground with others by affirming and contributing to

whatever is good, true, and beautiful in the world. In his closing admonition to the

Philippians Paul exhorts his readers to fix their thoughts on "*whatever* is true, *whatever* is

noble, *whatever* is right, *whatever* is pure, *whatever* is lovely, *whatever* is admirable—if

anything is excellent or praiseworthy" (Phil 4:8; emphasis added).[55] Paul can offer such

advice because, ultimately, everything that is genuinely good, true, and beautiful has its

origin in God and accordingly reflects God's character and glory to some degree

(sometimes clearly, often ambiguously). Consequently, Christians can join with others in

discovering and celebrating the wonders of creation in order to point them beyond

creation to the Creator. Third, Christians can find common ground with others by joining

with people who are legitimately pursuing the cause of justice in the world, regardless of

their culture or religion. As Jesus said about a man who was ministering in his name

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54. Sometimes writers who dislike rationalistic apologetics point out that Paul's speech at Athens was not very successful. My purpose here, however, is not to endorse rationalistic apologetics but to endorse incarnational apologetics. Whether or not Paul's speech instantly led others to conversion is beside the point. What is most instructive is that Paul took the opportunity to build bridges by finding common ground with others in order to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.

55. In context, Paul offers this instruction primarily as advice concerning Christian sanctification to help believers conform their thoughts and attitudes to Christ's. However, a few verses earlier Paul says, "Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do" (v. 5). In light of this, the passage is primarily about the formation of Christian believers, but such formation has apologetic implications.

though not among his twelve disciples, "Do not stop him . . . for whoever is not against us is for us" (Mark 9:39a, 40); likewise, the church should rejoice when others contribute to the cause of Christ, whether or not they do so knowingly. Another important text supporting this point is Matthew 25, in which Jesus says that anyone who feeds the hungry, shows hospitality to the stranger, clothes the naked, cares for the sick, or visits the prisoner is doing kingdom business and serving the King himself (whether they are conscious of it or not): "And the King will tell them, 'I assure you, when you did it to one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!'" (Matt 25:40).[56] Such joint action with people of other cultures and/or religions does not imply agreeing with them on all matters. As discussed in chapter six (section C.2), an incarnational model of cultural engagement needs to be balanced with a theology of the cross that recognizes both God's *YES* and God's *NO* to the world. However, it does mean acknowledging and affirming whatever principles and efforts we share in common in our joint pursuit of social and global justice for all of humanity.

2.   Incarnational means of engagement

As a general guideline for incarnational means of engaging the world, let me return briefly to the idea of finding common ground with others by affirming and contributing to whatever is good, true, and beautiful in the world. C. S. Lewis once insightfully observed that the most effective way for Christian scholars to influence the world is not for them to write books about Christianity but to make excellent contributions to scholarship in every field with their Christian presuppositions and values latent rather than stated or argued explicitly. Lewis's words are worth quoting at length:

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56.   See also Mark 9:36–37: "[Jesus] took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to [the disciples], "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

What we want is not more little books about Christianity, but more little books by Christians on other subjects—with their Christianity latent. You can see this most easily if you look at it the other way round. Our Faith is not very likely to be shaken by any book on Hinduism. But if whenever we read an elementary book on Geology, Botany, Politics, or Astronomy, we found that its implications were Hindu, that would shake us. It is not the books written in direct defense of Materialism that make the modern man a materialist; it is the materialistic assumptions in all the other books. In the same way, it is not books on Christianity that will really trouble him. But he would be troubled if, whenever he wanted a cheap popular introduction to some science, the best work on the market was always by a Christian. The first step to the re-conversion of this country is a series, produced by Christians, which can beat *Penguin* and the *Thinkers Library* on their own ground. Its Christianity would have to be latent, not explicit: and *of course* its science perfectly honest. Science *twisted* in the interest of apologetics would be sin and folly.[57]

Lewis is not saying that books about Christianity are unnecessary or insignificant (he himself wrote several such books!). What he is arguing is that books about Christianity are not sufficient to impact society in a pervasive and comprehensive way. For one thing, the market for 'Christian books' is simply not large enough to have that kind of influence. Moreover, although a narrow apologetic attempting to prove Christianity directly and explicitly is helpful for certain purposes (perhaps chiefly to affirm Christian believers in their faith), it has difficulty overcoming the power of pervasive assumptions and presuppositions that people hold implicitly and subconsciously (which is why a subtle, implicit approach—what Kierkegaard referred to as ironic or indirect communication— can often be more effective). More importantly though, Christianity is most compelling when people get a sense of its comprehensive coherence, its ability not only to defend its own claims but to cohere with and shed light on all matters of truth and all experiences of reality. To cite Lewis again, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen,

57. C. S. Lewis, "Christian Apologetics," in *God in the Dock. Essays on Theology and Ethics.* Quoted in Harry Lee Poe, *Christianity in the Academy: Teaching at the Intersection of Faith and Learning* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 51.

not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."[58] As Lesslie Newbigin argues, faith in Jesus Christ and belief in Christian revelation is not contrary to rationality but leads to a "more inclusive rationality."[59]

What Lewis says about Christian scholarship can also be applied to other forms of Christian witness, whether in community life, vocation, or service in the world. For example, it is helpful when Christian theologians reflect on and articulate Christian perspectives on business, politics, science, or music. However, to have maximum impact on our culture we also need wise, theologically informed Christian business leaders, politicians, scientists, and musicians who achieve excellence in their vocation and consequently exert great influence on their peers and perhaps the larger culture.[60] Similarly, we need wise, theologically informed educators, counsellors, lawyers, physicians, journalists, and film and media experts. We need wise and theologically informed parents, school teachers, guidance counsellors, police officers, local business owners. And we need wise and theologically formed athletes, actors, construction workers, trades people, and others who serve God faithfully and contribute to the world joyfully in their unique spheres of influence. In sum, the most compelling witness to the truth of the gospel in the world is the combined wisdom of the universal church, as it is displayed in the lives of myriad individual believers who, in faithfulness to God and in participation with God's Spirit, bless and influence the world by serving and contributing

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58. C. S. Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry?", in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 140.

59. Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 52–53.

60. It is important here distinguish between a superficial and an integrated synthesis of theology and pursuits like politics and business. See, for example, Oliver O'Donovan's helpful discussion of 'theological politics' versus 'political theology,' based on Kant's distinction between the 'moral politician' and the 'political moralist,' in *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 6–12.

to the best of their ability wherever God places them. In their life together, in their

various tasks and activities, and in their contributions to the world, believers are called to

bear witness to and embody the manifest wisdom of Christ and thereby to make Christian

belief and life coherent and compelling to an unbelieving world.

3.   Conclusion: Living by faith in a world of distrust and scepticism

"They alone know the right way to live." Such was the impression of many in

response to the communal life and witness of the early Christian church.[61] This is because

genuine Christian life leads to a new way to be human, a way that yields deep

satisfaction, joy, fulfilment, and practical wisdom for navigating life meaningfully and

fruitfully (though not without problems or hardships). Unfortunately, very few people

today have this impression of the contemporary church in North America. Cultural forces

such as secularism, materialism, and relativism have contributed to the church's waning

influence in society. At the same time many Christians live in ways that are virtually

indistinguishable from others in society; indeed, it often seems like contemporary culture

is shaping the church more than the church is influencing contemporary culture. To make

things even worse, scandals within the church and disunity between churches send the

message that Christians today do not know "the right way to live" (or at least, no more

than anyone else). As a result, many have become cynical about the church's integrity in

moral leadership. In such times as these, it is absolutely critical to the life and witness of

the church for Christians to regain an emphasis on being a people characterized by

wisdom.

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61.   Kreider, "They alone know," 169–76.

This chapter depicted the church as rational communities of the new humanity, which are part of God's redemptive plan to draw human beings back into the divine intelligible conversation. Such communities exist by faith before God and strive to live according to God's purposes and plans. They are dedicated to cultivating wisdom in their members through theological formation, constitutive and formative practices, and wise leadership and discipleship. They also seek to influence the broader culture by participating in Christ's prophetic ministry as witnesses and servants of the truth. They do so by engaging the world incarnationally, in order to demonstrate the attractiveness and coherence of the Christian faith in every aspect of life as the fulfilment of all that is good, true, and beautiful.

Chapter 8:
The Church as Eschatological Communities of Hope

A.   Introduction

Eschatology is influential for all dimensions of ecclesiology. The church is meant

to be essentially a forward-looking entity that finds its identity in the Risen Christ and

lives in the 'already-not yet' dimension of the new creation as the Holy Spirit continually

transforms it into the Body of Christ. Eschatology also resolves the tension within what

Fernando Enns calls the distinction between the "believed church" and the "experienced

church," by the eschatological concept of anticipation.[1] The "believed church" is what

Christians affirm about the church by faith concerning its "not yet" fulfilled aspects,

specifically that it is one (united), holy, catholic, and apostolic. The "experienced church"

is the concrete reality that Christians experience in the church's present or "already"

existence. Luther captures this experience with his famous notion that believers are *simul*

justus et peccator (justified and sinful at the same time) and with his depiction of the

church as a community of justified sinners.[2] The eschatological concept of anticipation

resolves the difference between the two. The present church is one (or unified) through

its faith in Jesus Christ and by the presence of the Spirit who is drawing it toward its

anticipated eschatological unity. It is holy as a community justified by faith in Christ,

which the Spirit is sanctifying and drawing toward its anticipated eschatological holiness.

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1.   For this distinction, see Fernando Enns, "Believers Church Ecclesiology: A Vital Alternative within the Ecumenical Family," in *New Perspectives in Believers Church Ecclesiology*, ed. Abe Dueck, Helmut Harder, and Karl Koop (Winnipeg: CMU, 2010), 108–13. For a discussion of eschatological anticipation as a way to resolve the tension between the present and the future church, see Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness. The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 140.

2.   For a summary of Luther's conception of the church as just and sinful, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical and Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 39–49. Recall also Bonhoeffer's argument that the church is not an ideal, but a divine reality in Christ which believers experience by faith. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, vol. 5 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Geffrey B. Kelly, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 35–38.

The present church is catholic as a world-wide community of faith in Christ into which

the Spirit is drawing people from every tribe, language, people, and nation (Rev 5:9–10)

in anticipation of the final gathering of the whole people of God.[3] Finally, the church is

apostolic by virtue of its faith in Jesus Christ, as witnessed and attested to by the apostles

and the prophets and as the Spirit draws it to its anticipated destiny as a "cloud of

witnesses" stretching back in time and gathering up all of salvation history.[4] Accordingly,

Volf summarizes the eschatological nature of church as follows:

> Every congregation that assembles around the one Jesus Christ as Savior and
> Lord in order to profess faith in him publicly in pluriform fashion, including
> through baptism and the Lord's Supper, and which is open to all churches of God
> and to all human beings, is a church in the full sense of the word, since Christ
> promised to be present in it through his Spirit as the first fruits of the gathering of
> the whole people of God in the eschatological reign of God. Such a congregation
> is a holy, catholic, and apostolic church.[5]

In this chapter, we will explore the notion of the church as eschatological

communities of the new humanity. Specifically, we will observe the ways in which an

eschatological conception impacts our understanding of the church's inner community

and ministries and its outward mission within and to the world. I will begin with a

discussion of the church as a Temple of the Holy Spirit, since it is the Spirit who

sanctifies the church and draws it toward eschatological fulfilment. Next, I will describe

the church as a kingdom community that forms kingdom disciples to become

representatives and witnesses of God's present and coming reign. Finally, I will explore

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3. Volf writes, "The local church is not a concrete realization of the existing universal church, but rather the real anticipation or proleptic realization of the eschatological gathering of the entire people of God." Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 140.

4. Volf writes, "Wherever the Spirit of Christ, which as the eschatological gift anticipates God's new creation in history (see Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:14), is present in its *ecclesially constitutive* activity, there is the church. The Spirit unites the gathered congregation with the triune God and integrates it into a history extending from Christ, indeed, from the Old Testament saints, to the eschatological new creation." Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 129.

5. Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 158 (original italics removed).

some implications for the church's mission as it engages the world by sharing in Christ's reign.

B.   Inner community life of the church

1.   The church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit

The Christian church is fundamentally a pneumatological community. The Holy Spirit plays a crucial role in constituting and forming the church and in sustaining, empowering, and guiding its life and mission.[6] Consider the following passages that describe the Spirit's relationship to the church: the Spirit gave birth to the church at Pentecost (Acts 2);[7] the Spirit binds the church together in unity (1 Cor 12; Eph 4); the Spirit speaks to and teaches the church (Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 29, 3:6, 13, 22); the Spirit strengthens and encourages the church (Acts 9:31); the Spirit appoints the church's leaders (Acts 20:28); and the Spirit gives charismatic gifts to the church (1 Cor 12).[8] In chapters six and seven we briefly explored the New Testament's depiction of the church as the Body of Christ and the People of God. A third basic way that the New Testament depicts the church is as the Temple of the Holy Spirit. In his first letter to the Corinthians Paul writes, "Do you not realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?" (1 Cor 3:16). In his second letter he writes, "For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people'" (2 Cor 6:16). In Ephesians,

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6.   Of course all three members are involved in the creation, formation, and transformation of the church, but each in each is involved in these in a particular way. As a summary, we might say that the church's constitution is 'of God,' 'in Christ,' and 'by the Holy Spirit.'

7.   See George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 384.

8.   Marshall stresses that "fellowship in the Holy Spirit" in 2 Corinthians is not simply companionship provided by the Spirit but is actually the fruit of joint participation in the Holy Spirit. I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 290.

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Paul says that believers are being built up "to become a holy temple in the Lord" and "a

dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Eph 2:19–22).[9] Similarly, the first letter of

Peter records that "God is building you, as living stones, into his spiritual temple"

characterized by belief in Jesus Christ, obedience to God's Word, holiness, goodness, and

honour, having been called out of darkness into God's wonderful light (1 Pet 2:5–12).

These passages describing the church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit reveal at

least five essential characteristics about the nature of the church. First, as a 'temple' the

church is the community that God's Spirit uniquely fills and indwells. Of course, God's

Spirit is not confined to the church but is omnipresent and active in creation wherever life

exists and flourishes.[10] However, Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit fills and indwells

the church in a unique and special way. The Spirit's presence in the church is unique

because here the Spirit draws people into the manifest presence of God and points them

simultaneously to the concrete revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Outside the church, the

Spirit of God fills and animates all of creation, pointing people to the Creator by means

of general revelation (Ps 19). Inside the church, the Spirit of God is experienced

specifically as *the Spirit of Jesus Christ* who brings people to explicit and concrete

knowledge of Christ by means of special revelation. The presence of Christ in the church

is vital to the church's existence and expansion.[11] In the Great Commission, Jesus

promised his disciples that he would be with them always, even to the end of the age

(Matt 28:20). The way in which Christ remains present with his disciples is by the Holy

Spirit. Consequently, after his resurrection Jesus tells his disciples that he will send the

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9. See also: Matt 21:13; 1 Cor 3:16–17; and Heb 10:19–15.
10. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).
11. This is a strong theme in Karl Barth's, "The Church: The Living Congregation of the Living Lord Jesus Christ," in *God Here and Now*, ed. Paul van Buren (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 61–85.

Spirit to them shortly and instructs them not to leave Jerusalem until the Spirit comes and fills them with power from heaven (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–5). Moreover, the entire book of Acts demonstrates that the presence of Christ by the Spirit is crucial to the church's ongoing community life and its effectiveness in mission.

Second, as the Temple of the Holy Spirit the church is a community of the covenant and thus a community of God's salvation. In 2 Corinthians, after describing the church as a temple of the living God, Paul applies Old Testament covenant language to the church: "As God has said, I will be their God and they will be my people" and "I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor 6:16, 18). These statements repeat the covenant blessings of the Old Testament and imply that the church is now God's people, God's sons and daughters. This is the community that God has redeemed and made God's own. It is the community that has experienced God's mighty act of deliverance in Jesus Christ. As such, it is the community of salvation, which knows God's saving grace and lives its renewed life according to God's purposes and plan.

Third, as the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the church is characterized by God's peace. In Ephesians, directly before he describes the church as a temple of the Spirit, Paul argues that God has brought peace between Jews and Gentiles and joined them together in Christ. He writes, "For Christ himself has made peace between us Jews and you Gentiles by making us all one people. He has broken down the wall of hostility that used to separate us" (Eph 2:14). Paul goes on to say, "Now all of us . . . may come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us" (Eph 2:18). Finally, Paul says that Jews and Gentiles together form a "holy temple in the Lord"

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because through Christ "Gentiles are also joined together as part of this dwelling where God lives by his Spirit" (Eph 2:22). The implication is that the church is a community in which God's peace reigns supreme, putting an end to hostility, animosity, and ethnocentricity and bringing forgiveness and reconciliation between alienated groups and enemies as they find peace together in Christ by the Spirit.

Fourth, as the Temple of the Holy Spirit the church is a community of spiritual and moral transformation characterized by "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17). The church is the community that the Spirit of Love and Holiness uniquely sets apart, sanctifies, and sends into the world as a holy royal priesthood to reflect God's presence, bear witness to the gospel, and pursue God's missional purposes (1 Cor 3:17; 2 Cor 6:17; 1 Pet 2:9–10). The early Christian creeds, such as the Apostles' and Nicene creeds, spoke of the church in reference to the Holy Spirit (in the third article after discussing the Father and the Son) and identified holiness as a defining characteristic or 'mark' of the church. Accordingly, many traditional systematic theologies follow the basic layout of the early creeds and discuss the church in close relation to the Holy Spirit and the doctrine of sanctification. While all of the persons of the Trinity are always united in action and thus involved in every aspect of Christian existence, the creeds associate each trinitarian person in a special way with particular roles and activities: God the Father with creation, God the Son with redemption, and God the Holy Spirit with sanctification or transformation. The church is identified especially with the Holy Spirit because its task is most *directly* associated with spiritual and moral transformation (rather than creation or redemption) toward the new creation. The church does not redeem or save people, because Christ accomplished salvation on our behalf

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once and for all by his death and resurrection (though as a community of salvation the church does embody salvation and participate by the Spirit in reconciliation, witness, evangelism, etc.). However, the church *is* actively and directly involved in transforming people as it participates in the Spirit's ministry of sanctification. As a temple of the Holy Spirit, the church is called to form believers deliberately in love and holiness. It does this by helping believers cultivate the fruit of the Spirit, by immersing them in the worshipping life of the community, by instructing them in the Word of God and in theological education, by placing them with others in relationships of spiritual edification and accountability, and by apprenticing them in the spiritual practices and disciplines that help foster love and holiness.

Fifth, as the Temple of the Holy Spirit the church is the community in which God's reign is acknowledged, obeyed, and continually sought. In chapter five we observed that Genesis 1 (in collaboration with several other OT passages) depicts creation as God's palace-temple, which God fills and reigns and in which God places human beings to serve as steward-priests. Similarly, the image of the church as God's temple indicates that God is manifestly present and reigning amongst God's people, who are God's "royal priesthood." As a royal priesthood, this new covenant community is dedicated to seeking and serving God's reign. As the church seeks and serves God's reign, the Holy Spirit makes God's eschatological kingdom a present, experienced reality for God's people in the church.[12] Moreover, the Spirit continually calls the church into its

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12. Interestingly, the church as the temple of the Holy Spirit possesses several characteristic that identify it with God's kingdom reign. In their discussion of the impact of God's reign, as demonstrated in the gospels read in light of the book of Isaiah, Stassen and Gushee identify seven characteristic marks of the kingdom. These include the following (notice the parallels to the present discussion of the church as the Spirit's temple, marked in italics): (1) *deliverance/salvation*; (2) *righteousness/justice*; (3) *peace*; (4) *joy*; (5) *God's presence as Spirit or light*; (6) healing; and (7) return from exile (perhaps we could include this last characteristic as well, since there is no temple in exilic existence). Glen H. Stassen and David P.

future, shaping and transforming it in light of its ultimate destiny when it will enter into the kingdom of God in fullness. Thus, filled and guided by the Spirit, the church is called to seek first God's kingdom (Matt 6:33) and to embody the reality of God's presence and reign in its life and mission by existing as a sign, instrument, and foretaste of the eschatological kingdom.[13] In the following section, we will explore what it means for the church to be a kingdom community.

2.   The church as a kingdom community

Called to a task and a destiny

In chapter five we observed that as eschatological creatures, human beings were created for a God-given task and destiny. God gave human beings the task of ruling over the created world as steward-priests of creation by faithfully sustaining, restoring, and improving it. Moreover, God did not create human beings as fully mature to remain in a static state, but in a seed-like state of infancy to change, develop, and advance over time. Their ultimate destiny is to mature into the image of Jesus Christ and to serve as his steward-priests in the new creation. As eschatological communities of the new humanity, the church is similarly called to a task and a destiny. Its task is to form and equip Christian believers to be people who bear witness to the reality and reign of God by seeking first Christ's kingdom, by embodying its values and priorities, and by participating in its expansion in the world.[14] As Grenz puts it, "Believers enter into covenant with God and each other so that they might be an eschatological community,

Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics. Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 25.

13.   Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 229; Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 101, 104, 106.

14.   Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 475–79.

the fellowship that pioneers in the present the principles that characterize the reign of

God."[15] The church's destiny is ultimately to be transformed, along with all things being

redeeming in Christ, into the eschatological kingdom of God. This destiny fills the church

with Spirit-inspired hope for the future, which guides and empowers its life together and

mission in the present. Accordingly, Bonhoeffer says that "the church of Jesus Christ is

the place—that is, the space—in the world where the reign of Jesus Christ over the whole

world is to be demonstrated and proclaimed."[16] Presently, however, while the church is

intimately related to the kingdom of God the two should not be equated. In order for the

church to seek the kingdom appropriately, it is important to be aware of the continuities

and discontinuities between the church and the kingdom.

The church and the kingdom

George Ladd points out that the kingdom of God is not equivalent to its subjects.

Rather, the subjects of God's kingdom enter it, live under it, and are governed by it. To

explain further the distinction between church and kingdom, Ladd offers five clarifying

points.[17] First, the church is not the kingdom but is oriented to it. "The kingdom is the

rule of God; the church is a society of men and women."[18] The church may properly be

called a community of the kingdom, one dedicated to living out God's rule, but it cannot

simply be equated with the kingdom. The genuine church always points beyond itself to

God's glory and rule. Second, the kingdom creates the church. In one of Jesus's parables

the kingdom is like a net that is drawn through the sea, catching both good and bad fish.

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15. Grenz, *Theology*, 479.

16. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*. vol. 6 of *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss, Charles C. West, and Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 63.

17. See also Grenz, *Theology*, 478–79. Grenz similarly argues that the kingdom is broader than the church, that the church is dependent on the kingdom (a product of the kingdom), that the church derives its purpose from God's activity in the world, and that the church is determined by its future destiny.

18. Ladd. *Theology of the New Testament*, 110.

When it is brought to shore the fish are sorted: the good fish are kept, while the bad ones are thrown away (Matt 13:47–50). The first batch, which includes both good and bad fish, represents the church. Significantly, the sorting between the two does not take place until the end of time.[19] This implies that the church is not an ideal society of perfect people, but a mixed and often messy human community. The kingdom of God does not create a pure fellowship in the present era, but a mixed fellowship of both genuine and false members (and even genuine members are, as Luther says, justified and sinful at the same time). Not everyone in the church is genuine, but we are called nonetheless to love and serve every member, to refrain from prejudging their hearts (only God can discern hearts), and to encourage one another lovingly and truthfully toward holiness and obedience. That the kingdom creates the church also means that while kingdom growth leads necessarily to church growth, church growth does not necessarily lead to kingdom growth. Accordingly, in our efforts to grow churches we need to be very careful not to compromise the values, priorities, practices, and worldview of the kingdom. This point is particularly important in light of our culture's warped understanding of success and power and its commitment to materialism and consumerism. As Gareth Brandt cautions,

> When churches are something we shop for based on personal need, when salvation becomes a product that is marketed and sold, there is a theological problem. The is not so much with particular programs and all the good that they may have accomplished for individuals and churches involved, but with the underlying individualistic theology and the ecclesiology of consumerism.[20]

In contrast, Jesus commands us to prioritize the kingdom above all else and to align our concerns, agendas, and plans accordingly (Matt 6:33).

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19. Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 111. See also Jesus's parable of the wheat and the weeds (Matt 13:24–30).

20. Gareth Brandt, "How Anabaptist Theology and the Emergent Church Address the Problem of Individualism in the Believers Church," in *New Perspectives in Believers Church Ecclesiology*, ed. Abe Dueck, Helmut Harder, and Karl Koop (Winnipeg: CMU, 2010), 273.

Third, the church bears witness to the kingdom. Ladd argues that the church does not build, create, or grow the kingdom (God does this), but *bears witness* to the rule of God in its speaking and acting. It is called to live provocatively as a sign and foretaste of God's kingdom—not to build it.[21] Ladd's cautionary point is well-taken: kingdom building is first and foremost God's work and the church must resist a triumphalist, semi-Pelagian mindset that equates its own efforts, growth, and success with the gracious work of God and the expansion of God's reign. Indeed, Jesus teaches that the kingdom grows mysteriously, secretly, and with power and impact that far exceeds human efforts and initiatives and is beyond human control (e.g., Jesus's parables of the farmer scattering seed and the mustard seed in Matt 13 and the story of the farmer who planted seed that grew without the farmer's help in Mark 4:26–29). However, Ladd's insight should not be overstressed to the point that it downplays the importance of active human involvement in the expansion of the kingdom (an exclusive emphasis on witness seems to do this). After all, Jesus told his disciples to *seek* the kingdom actively and to let their *good deeds* shine before others. He called them to be *workers* in the harvest field and implied that they would be involved in kingdom work at various levels and stages (planting seed, watering, harvesting, etc.). Thus, God's initiative, grace and power in building and advancing the kingdom should be emphasized together with human responsibility, service, and strategic and disciplined effort in faithfulness to God's call. Consequently, I suggest that the best way to account for both of these emphases is by invoking the

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21. Ladd writes, "If Jesus' disciples are those who have received the life and fellowship of the kingdom, and if this life is in fact an anticipation of the eschatological kingdom, then it follows that one of the main tasks of the church is to display in the present age the life and fellowship of the Age to come" (*Theology of the New Testament*, 113).

concept of participation. In union with Christ by the Spirit, believers *actively participate*

in *God's work* of extending the kingdom by God's grace, presence, and power.

Fourth, the church is the instrument of the kingdom.[22] It is the servant of the

kingdom and of the God who is sovereign over it. Just as Abraham's election and calling

involved being a blessing to all of the peoples on earth (Gen 12:3), so the church is

elected and called to be salt, light, a city set on a hill, and a blessing to the nations (Matt

5:13–16; Acts 1:6–8; 10:34–35, 44–48). Consequently, a kingdom community is not

insular and inward-focused, but serves God's broader social and global kingdom

purposes in and for the world. Finally, the church is the custodian of the kingdom. To the

church Jesus gave the keys of the kingdom, which Ladd interprets as spiritual insight to

lead others through the door of revelation.[23] In other words, the church is *apostolic*,

standing not on its own authority but on the Word of God and the foundation laid by the

apostles and prophets who bore original witness to that Word.

Communities of kingdom character formation

N. T. Wright argues that according to the New Testament, Christian character

formation is part of becoming more genuinely human. Consequently, the transformation

of character takes on central significance in the lives of believers after they come to faith

in Christ.[24] Joseph J. Kotva, Jr. argues persuasively that Christianity views the moral life

as a journey toward becoming a certain kind of person within a certain kind of

community, one that cultivates Christian virtues.[25] Stanley Hauerwas portrays the church

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22. Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 114.

23. Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 114–17.

24. N. T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 26, 29.

25. Joseph J. Kotva, Jr., *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996).

as a "school of virtue" and asserts that "the most important social task of Christians is to

be nothing less than a community capable of forming people with virtues sufficient to

witness to God's truth in the world."[26] I agree with these authors and would specify

further that God calls church congregations to exist as communities of kingdom character

formation that experience the blessings of the kingdom in their inner community lives

and exhibit the presence and characteristics of the kingdom in their mission to the world.

In their discussion of Christian character ethics, Stassen and Gushee list four crucial

components of character formation, including: (1) worldview immersion in a larger

drama (Scripture); (2) the cultivation of virtues; (3) through specific character forming

practices, and (4) within the context of a community of disciples.[27] They summarize as

follows:

> In *biblical character* ethics, the good we serve is the *reign of God*, and the reign
> of God is oriented toward *community* with God (God's presence and salvation)
> and community with our fellow human beings (peace and justice). The biblical
> *virtues* are keys to community well-being: peacemaking, hungering for justice,
> doing mercy, integrity, humility and caring for the poor and the mourning. And
> they are the way of *participation* in community with God.[28]

We will discuss the role of Scripture and formative practices below (section B.3) and this

whole chapter is about the role of community in shaping and equipping kingdom

disciples and representatives. At present, let us briefly consider the role of virtues in

kingdom community formation. A virtue is a disposition or quality (usually cultivated

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26. Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 3, 83–86.

27. Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 56–57.

28. Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 53 (emphasis added to highlight key components). N. T. Wright states the key points slightly differently: (1) the goal is the new heaven and new earth, with human beings raised from the dead to be the renewed world's rulers and priests; (2) this goal is achieved through the kingdom-establishing work of Jesus and the Spirit, which we grasp by faith, participate in by Baptism, and live out in love; (3) Christian living in the present consists of anticipating this ultimate reality though the Spirit-led, habit-forming, truly human practice of faith, hope, and love, sustaining Christians in their calling to worship God and reflect his glory in the world. N. T. Wright, *After You Believe*, 67.

through practice) that predisposes a person to think and act consistently (or

characteristically) in morally virtuous ways that are oriented toward a conception of the

good (*telos*) and framed within a comprehensive vision of reality.[29] According to this

dissertation, Christian virtues are qualities that enable believers to pursue and attain their

telos as relational, rational, and eschatological creatures to whom God relates as

Reconciler, Creator, and Transformer (they reach their *telos* in fullness at their final

resurrection and glorification in the age to come). The human *telos* includes loving God

and other human beings, knowing God and understanding God's created world, and

serving God and others as steward-priests infused with new creation hope and vision.

One of the debates among virtue or character ethicists concerns the question of

which virtues should be prioritized and pursued. Christian virtue ethicists generally agree

that Scripture does not provide a single comprehensive and definitive list of virtues, but

most argue that certain virtues have greater prominence than others. I suggest that three

orienting questions can help us specify which virtues to prioritize. The first question

concerns being human: Which virtues relate most fundamentally to the human *telos* and

thus aid the ongoing transformation of redeemed persons into new human beings in the

new creation? In response to this question, I suggest that while there are many Christian

virtues, the three most basic to our transformation into the new humanity are love, faith,

and hope (and among these love is prominent according to 1 Cor 13). These three are

most basic to human transformation for two reasons. First, they are basic because they

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29.   For other helpful discussions of Christian virtues, see: Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 121–23; Kotva, *The Christian Case*, 17–26; Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 32–54; and Wright, *After You Believe*, 181–218.

most fundamentally and broadly serve the human *telos*.[30] Thus, love enables human beings to purse a right relationship with God and other human beings, faith enables humans to pursue genuine knowledge of God and seek understanding about the created world (together amounting to wisdom), and hope enables humans to pursue their task and destiny as steward-priests of the new creation. Second, these three virtues are basic because they orient and infuse the other virtues in distinctly Christian ways. For example, in his discussion of Christian virtues Augustine reinterpreted and modified the classic Platonic virtues of courage, temperance, wisdom, and justice to reflect the centrality of love in Christian ethics.[31] While I do not wish to follow Augustine's retention of the priority of the Platonic virtues (even when reinterpreted), his insight that Christian love infuses the other virtues is helpful. Every Christian virtue requires love because love is the essence of God's character and the basis of all God's laws and commands (as Jesus and Paul attest, love for God and others summarizes the law and the prophets). The same holds for faith and hope. Faith is a necessary ingredient to every virtue because Christian virtues are not abstract principles drawn from a general metaphysics but particular qualities oriented to the person, character, and concrete teachings of Jesus Christ. Jesus does not just point the way toward authentic humanness; he *is* the authentic human being and *is the way* to authentic humanness (John 14:6). Believers pursue Christian virtues because such virtues characterized the life and teachings of Jesus, in whom they have placed personal faith and trust. In addition, hope infuses every virtue because Christian virtues are not just future-oriented but are more specifically eschatologically inspired, which means that they are enabled, magnified, guided, and eventually perfected by the

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30. As Kotva argues, the virtues are both means to and constituent elements of the human *telos* (*The Christian Case*, 20–22).

31. Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 122. See also Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 51–53.

presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, as a future-oriented virtue that serves

human eschatological transformation, hope is crucial to the effectiveness of Christian

formative practices interpreted as transforming initiatives (see below). Viewed as mere

rules, practices such as turning the other cheek would be hopeless and idealistic.

However, as transforming initiatives they reflect the Christian eschatological hope for a

better future in God's kingdom and provide concrete ways of breaking present vicious

cycles of sin in light of God's in-breaking reign—a point to which we will return later.

The second orienting question concerns being in community: What are the

purpose and key characteristics of Christian community and which virtues enable

Christians to become healthy and contributing members that promote its well-being? As

virtue ethicists point out, virtues are partially defined in relation to a conception of human

sociality and how individual members contribute and relate to one another in it.[32]

Different conceptions of society prioritize different kinds of virtues. For example, in

ancient Greek societies people understood their identity and responsibilities in terms of

their social roles and relations to others as contributing to the well-being of society in the

context of the Homeric world. That society was believed to reflect the structure of the

cosmos, in which human beings were subject to the gods and to their earthy

representative (kings). Virtues were defined according to social roles, as qualities that

enabled people to fulfill their function in society, the most important of which was the

role of the warrior-king who epitomized the heroic virtues (e.g., courage).[33] In contrast, in

classical Athens the philosophers challenged the older worldview and gave prominence

to reason, which in the Platonic cosmology structurally reflected the eternal Mind as

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32.   Stassen and Gushee. *Kingdom Ethics*. 53.
33.   Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame
.Press, 1988), 14–16.

mediated by *Logos*. In light of this conception Plato proposed that the supreme virtue is justice, which aligns both the functioning of society (the *polis*) and the roles of individuals within it according to reason.[34] He understood social and personal virtues in correspondence with the *telos* of the Greek *polis* (e.g., the philosopher king now replaced the warrior king). In this dissertation, I have described Christian sociality in terms of the church as relational, rational, and eschatological communities in which human beings are being formed—personally and socially—to reflect the image of Jesus Christ. Christian virtues, consequently, enable Christians to become healthy and contributing members who promote the well-being of such communities. This involves cultivating both relational virtues (infused with love) and rational virtues (infused with faith to foster wisdom), both of which are oriented (in hope) toward the future of God's already-not yet eschatological kingdom reign. Stassen and Gushee propose that the virtues promoting kingdom life and effectiveness include: peacemaking, hungering for justice, doing mercy, integrity, humility, and caring for the poor and the mourning. These virtues serve the well-being of the church community and reflect the seven marks of God's reign, which are: deliverance/salvation, righteousness/justice, peace, joy, God's presence as Spirit or light, healing, and restoration from exile.[35] They also permeate Jesus's discussion of kingdom living in Matthew 5:21–48, as qualities that equip disciples to respond in characteristically kingdom ways to concrete problems threatening their community life, such as anger, divorce, lust, deception, vengeance, and hatred. Additionally, they pervade Jesus's discussion of kingdom spiritual formation in Matthew 6–7 as qualities that equip disciples to approach spirituality in characteristically kingdom ways as they pray, fast,

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34. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, 74.
35. Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 37–48, 53.

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and practice simplicity and charity toward others while avoiding the traps of false

spirituality—hypocrisy, vainglory, greed, anxiety, and self-righteousness. In sum, the

point is not simply to compile a list of virtues, but to reflect on what characteristic

qualities and behaviours best foster kingdom community life and equip disciples to resist

harmful social temptations and vices.

The third orienting question concerns Christian witness or mission: What context-

specific virtues will enable Christians to impact the world missionally, both as members

of a local congregation and in their personal vocation or calling? In his Sermon on the

Mount, Jesus clearly intends his teaching to have an impact not just *within* Christian

communities, but also *through* them in order to transform the world (Matt 5:13–16; 7:24–

29). Consider also Paul's discussion of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, which in

many ways parallels Jesus's teaching in purpose and content. When Paul lists the fruit of

the Spirit, he is not intending a comprehensive catalogue of virtues but providing

concrete examples of what the transformative presence of the Holy Spirit looks like in the

life of believers.[36] Moreover, Paul is not creating a general list devoid of a cultural

context (his letters were always occasioned by the concrete contexts and issues of the

congregations). Rather, he precedes his discussion of the fruit of the Spirit with a list of

cultural vices (5:19–21a) that were threatening the Galatians' ability to be kingdom

people: "anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the kingdom of God" (5:21b). In

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36. The fruit of the Spirit is not primarily an imperative command or law but an indicative description of the Spirit-formed character of believers bearing implicit ethical implications (demonstrating the fulfilment of the law in the Spirit-filled life). As N. T. Wright nicely puts it, Paul "is *not* saying, 'Once the Spirit has taken up residence in a person or community, these are the things which will happen automatically,' as though thereby to reinforce the romantic or existentialist approach to behavior against some kind of legalism. Nor is he saying, 'Now that you've got the Spirit, isn't it great that you can get rid of that silly old Law with all its moral restrictions?' Rather, he is saying, 'This, after all, is the behavior which the Spirit produces; can't you see that you don't need to impose the Mosaic Law on converts in order to generate people like that?'" Wright, *After You Believe*, 194–95 (emphasis original).

this context, the fruit of the Spirit manifests as virtues that identify and characterize

people of the kingdom over against those living according to the vices of the sinful

nature. Paul's discussion has missional implications because Christian mission has to do

with the redemption and transformation of individuals and society, from the corrupt

nature of the old creation to the Spirit-filled nature of the new creation. The fruit flowing

from the Spirit's presence in the lives of Christians includes the cultivation of qualities

that help them to resist and conquer the vices and idols of their culture—an important

aspect of their mission of social transformation.

To summarize the implications of the present discussion, contemporary churches

should employ three guidelines when considering which virtues they should prioritize as

they seek to form their members. First, they should ensure that Christian formation

always aims to foster love, faith, and hope, which are crucial to the transformation of

believers into the new humanity. Second, they should consider the inner life of their

congregations and seek to cultivate virtues that promote genuine kingdom relationships

and guard against cultural influences that threaten to destroy the integrity and

distinctiveness of the kingdom community. Finally, they should ponder which qualities

are especially relevant to the community's concrete missional context (see section C

below).

3.   Ministries of kingdom orientation and training

In the previous two chapters I discussed church practices that help to promote

relational formation and wisdom cultivation in Christian communities. Here I will discuss

church practices that promote the eschatological formation of Christian believers by

immersing them in kingdom life and forming them to be kingdom people. Stassen and

Gushee state that "*according to Jesus, there is no authentic Christianity, discipleship or Christian ethics apart from doing the deeds he taught his followers to do.*"[37] Jesus intended such deeds not to be moralistic works of self-righteousness that earn God's favour, but concrete acts of faithful obedience that gradually form people to exemplify the character of Jesus and the reality of God's reign.[38] Given that the purpose of this dissertation is to focus on ecclesiology in light of theological anthropology, rather than to develop a full-blown Christian ethics, I will restrict my present focus to practices that are especially relevant for forming the church as a kingdom community.

Word and sacramental ordinances

The ministry of preaching helps people to see themselves as characters in God's ongoing drama of creation, redemption, and eschatological transformation. Interpreted specifically as a kingdom forming practice, preaching helps people to envision and anticipate God's kingdom reign and live accordingly. This provides at least four guidelines for Christian preaching. First, as a kingdom practice preaching is a pneumatological activity. Helping people envision and anticipate the kingdom is not equivalent to organizational vision casting or mission strategizing. It is revelatory work and involves actively seeking to participate in the Spirit's ministry of opening eyes to see, ears to hear, and minds to understand. Consequently, the preacher's own spiritual life is of the utmost importance. Preachers should know God's presence and voice. They should immerse themselves in the Scriptures and take adequate time to engage the Bible in

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37. Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 486 (emphasis original).
38. Stassen and Gushee include several examples (not intended to be an exhaustive list), including biblical study and reflection, peacemaking, protecting human life, sexual purity, gender equality, marriage fidelity and commitment, acts of mercy and love toward the those who are underprivileged, suffering or oppressed, honesty and integrity, work for just racial and economic relations, creation care, spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, and retaining distinctiveness as kingdom people even while engaging the world in mission. Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 487–88. .

depth—analytically *and* imaginatively, reflectively *and* prayerfully. To increase their

imaginative depth and spiritual vitality in preaching, preachers could benefit from

practicing not just exegetical methods but also spiritual exercises in scriptural meditation,

contemplation, and listening, such as *lectio divina*, gospel contemplation, and the daily

examen.[39] Second, preachers should put creative energy into articulating the wonder and

attractiveness of life in the kingdom. Just as Jesus made the kingdom of God come alive

for people through parables, stories, and personally relevant interaction, so Christian

preachers should strive to render kingdom life compelling to believers and thus help them

envisage the glorious scope and magnitude of God's purposes and plan. Third, kingdom

preaching strives always to integrate biblical exegesis and theological reflection with

contextual implications for ethical living. Kingdom preaching means drawing from deep

theological wells in order to elicit profound life transformation. It aims to renovate

values, realign priorities, and redirect energies in accordance with God's reign. Fourth,

kingdom preaching involves concrete and practical application to the lives of hearers.

Concreteness and practicality stipulate that preachers promote neither lofty (even

unattainable) ideals nor burdensome and legalistic rules but practical steps that people

can take, by God's grace and power, as they begin the process of transformation and

increasingly exhibit kingdom living. Such preaching equips people with what Stassen and

Gushee call "transforming initiatives" (see below) or what N. T. Wright calls "initial

guidelines." In light of God's grace and blessing, these guidelines provide specific,

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39. For examples of books introducing such exercises, see: Jeannette A. Bakke, *Holy Invitations·
Exploring Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); Richard J. Foster, *Life With God: Reading The
Bible For Spiritual Transformation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008); Alice Fryling, *Seeking God
Together· An Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009); and M.
Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina· Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* (Chestnut Ridge:
Crossroad, 1998).

practical steps of obedient action that simultaneously set people walking on the path of

kingdom transformation. Wright explains the concept this way:

> There is an old saying: Give someone a fish and you feed them for a day; teach
> someone to fish and you feed them for life. Paul's normal practice, in teaching
> his converts, is the latter. His version of the saying seems to be: Give people a
> command for a particular situation, and you help them live appropriately for a
> day; teach them to think Christianly about behavior, and they will be able to
> navigate by themselves into areas where you hadn't given any specific
> instructions. But what Paul does, again and again, is to give *initial guidelines*,
> especially in areas where the outworking of Christian virtue will lead people into
> behavior patterns that will look surprising to them, and perhaps shocking to their
> neighbours.[40]

Like the ministry of the Word, the sacramental ordinances are also designed to

nurture believers in kingdom life and worldview by immersing them in God's grand

salvation drama. As special practices that Jesus himself inaugurated, they are constitutive

for the life of the church and formative for its identity and destiny. As Stanley Hauerwas

strongly asserts, "The church is where the stories of Israel and Jesus are told, enacted, and

heard, and it is our conviction that as a Christian people there is literally nothing more

important we can do."[41] Baptism as an eschatological practice signifies new birth (or new

creation) to a new life in the Spirit. It also signifies a transfer of loyalties, from serving

primarily personal, cultural, national, and demonic agendas and kingdoms to serving

Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords and dedicating oneself to praying for and

pursuing Christ's kingdom.[42] The Lord's Supper is also an eschatological practice. It

looks not only backward in time to remember Christ's sacrifice, but also forward in time

to the great banquet or feast at the final gathering of the People of God when Christ's

kingdom is fully established (Matt 22:1–14; Luke 14:15–24). In previous chapters we

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40. Wright, *After You Believe*, 199 (emphasis original).
41. Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom. A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 99.
42. Grenz, *Theology*, 522.

observed that as a relational practice the Lord's Supper is "Holy Communion," which brings people together in the presence of Christ and fosters love for God and one another (chapter 6). As a rational practice, the Lord's Supper is a meal of remembrance and thanksgiving (Eucharist), which recalls Christ's last supper with his disciples and binds present believers to Christ's life and ministry by faith (chapter 7). As an eschatological practice, the Supper looks forward with hope and joy to the wedding feast of the Lamb (Rev 19:6–9) and brings motivation and encouragement to persist in following Christ in the present. Together, Baptism and the Lord's Supper as eschatological practices help believers look forward in hope to the fulfillment of God's saving work and the full establishment of God's kingdom. They emphasize new life in the Spirit, loyalty to Christ, and hope in God's grand salvation plan, not only for individual believers but also in anticipation of the whole of God's new creation.

Formative practices

Worship is an important formative practice for the church as an eschatological community, continually renewing the church in its identity, mission, and destiny. Several characteristics of Christian worship highlight its eschatological significance. First, worship is about seeking God's manifest presence with the expectation of encountering God's Spirit. God's Spirit makes God's future reign a present reality for believers and makes the church community into a sign and foretaste of God's kingdom. Second, worship is about celebrating and anticipating God's future reign with hope and expectancy. For example, the christological hymn recorded in Philippians 2:5–11 ends with the eschatological declaration that "at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ

is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (vv.10–11). The structure of many traditional hymns also demonstrates such eschatological anticipation, often beginning with rehearsing and praising God's works in creation and redemption and then typically leading to a final verse that anticipates the glory of the eschaton (thus involving past, present, and future).[43] Third, worship is about reorienting our thoughts, attitudes, and worldview according to kingdom teachings, loyalty to Jesus Christ as Lord, and the reality of God's reign. Fourth, worship realigns our affections and desires, forming us to love God with all that we are and do and to love others as ourselves.[44] Fifth, worship is about renewing our dedication to the Great Commission and to the task of seeking first the kingdom of God in our own lives as well as through our influence in the world. Sixth, worship is about receiving refreshment, encouragement, insight, strength, and power from God's Spirit to participate in God's mission of eschatological transformation and new creation.

Another key formative eschatological practice is prayer, particularly prayer that is patterned after the Lord's Prayer. Given its place in the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord's Prayer is an example of how kingdom people characteristically pray. Space precludes an in-depth analysis here, but let us consider briefly some key features of the Lord's Prayer as a kingdom prayer. First, the prayer glorifies God and specifically pleads for the coming of God's kingdom into the lives of believers and the world: "Our Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in

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43. Think for example of hymns such as: *Amazing Grace*: "When we've been there ten thousand years . . ."; *Holy, Holy, Holy*: "All thy works shall praise thy works shall praise thy name in earth and sky and sea . . ." (in fact, the whole song derives imagery from Rev 4–5); *My Jesus I Love Thee*: "In mansions of glory and endless delight . . ."; and *All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name*: "We'll join the everlasting song and crown him Lord of all."

44. For an extensive treatment of worship as a fundamental practice that realigns our desires and loves, see James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

heaven." Second, it requests God's sustenance for daily needs: "Give us today our daily bread." In its kingdom-oriented context, this requests makes most comprehensive sense not only as a request for biological nourishment but also, and in particular, as a request for God to provide everything that is necessary for enjoying and pursuing kingdom life to its fullest. Third, the prayer reflects the nature of the church as a community of kingdom reconciliation in which grace, forgiveness, and mercy are defining marks: "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who have sinned against us." Finally, the prayer emphasises loyalty to God and God's kingdom purposes, which means renouncing the influence of Satan and the kingdom of darkness: "Lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from the evil one." The Lord's Prayer is a continual reminder that our allegiance lies not with the world and its agendas, but with Christ and his kingdom.[45]

A third major way in which believers are formed in kingdom life is by practicing what Stassen and Gushee call "transforming initiatives."[46] Transforming initiatives are deliberate, specific, concrete, and achievable actions that initiate kingdom transformation by breaking vicious cycles or patterns of sin. For example, one breaks the vicious cycle of lust by doing concrete things to remove temptations (e.g., avoiding watching videos with sexual content). Such transforming initiatives are performed in a posture of humility, grace, and truth, and receive strength and motivation from the fundamental Christian

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45.   In addition to these specific observations of the Lord's Prayer, the practice of prayer strengthens believers to prioritize and pursue the kingdom in many other ways. In their insightful discussion of the relevance of prayer for Christian life and ethics, Stassen and Gushee argue that prayer: deepens our commitment to the narrative of the kingdom of God; binds us more thoroughly to God in Jesus Christ; connects us more closely with fellow brothers and sisters who are also giving their lives to the reign of God; aligns our will with God's will and the contours of God's reign; allows us to participate in the advancement of the kingdom by petitioning for its coming; alerts us to the wiles of the devil and strengthens us to resist; deepens our trust in God and strengthens our willingness to take risks; purifies us of mixed allegiances; trains our hearts to seek heavenly rather than earthly rewards; keeps us from the idolatrous pursuit of worldly security; helps us to be critical of unjust worldly powers and systems; and aids our moral and decision making processes.Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 449–66.

46.   See Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 125–45.

virtues of love, faith, and hope. Their aim is not simply to solve problems in the present

(vicious cycles rarely have instant solutions) but to initiate provocative change and

cultivate consistent virtue on the basis of a hope-filled vision of the future.[47] Performed in

the liberating power of God's eschatological Spirit, transforming initiatives thus invade

the myopic and self-enclosed strongholds of sin in the present with the hope and vision of

God's future. While it is possible to suggest numerous transforming initiatives on the

basis of the Bible's teachings, Stassen and Gushee derive fourteen directly from the

teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. They notice that the Sermon presents

fourteen triads each consisting of a traditional ethical command, a vicious cycle caused

by a root problem that the popular misapplication of the command only reinforced, and a

transforming initiative to break the vicious cycle. These fourteen cases provide a good

overall example of how transforming initiatives function. They are depicted in the

following chart, which I have borrowed from Stassen and Gushee and modified with the

inclusion of a "virtues" column in order to demonstrate the relationship between

transforming initiatives and virtues in the development of Christian character.[48]

Table 8.2: The 14 Triads of the Sermon on the Mount and Corresponding Virtues

Traditional Righteousness	Vicious Cycle	Transforming Initiative	Relevant Virtues
1. You shall not kill	Anger, saying 'you fool'	Go, be reconciled	Peacemaking, humility, gentleness
2. You shall not commit adultery	Lust as committing adultery in one's heart	Remove the cause of temptation	Self-control, goodness, sorrow over sin.

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47. Transforming initiatives link together being and becoming in a holistic and integrated way, thus overcoming the limitations inherent to the proposals of both Idealists (who emphasize *being* as true identity) and Existentialists (who emphasize *becoming through choice and action* as true identity). As Kotva argues, 'being' precedes 'doing' but 'doing' also shapes 'being.' Who we have become, including our states of character, precedes and informs our choices and actions. However, our choices and actions also shape who we are and thus also what we will choose and do in the future. Kotva, *The Christian Case*, 30.

48. For the original table, see Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 142.

Traditional Righteousness	Vicious Cycle	Transforming Initiative	Relevant Virtues
3. Whoever divorces, give a certificate	Divorcing involves you in adultery	(Be reconciled: 1 Cor. 7:11)	Righteousness/justice, peacemaking
4. You shall not swear falsely	Swearing by anything involves dishonesty	Let your yes be yes, and your no be no	Honesty, faithfulness, purity of heart
5. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth	Vengeance or retaliation by evil means	Turn the other cheek, go the second mile, etc.	Humility, peacemaking, self control, kindness
6. Love neighbour and hate enemy	Hating enemies is the same vicious cycle you see in the Gentiles and tax collectors	Love enemies, pray for persecutors; be all-inclusive as God is	Goodness (like God), peacemaking, humility, kindness, merciful, forbearing
7. When you give alms	Righteousness for show	Give in secret	Purity of heart, hunger for righteousness
8. When you pray	Righteousness for show	Pray in secret	Purity of heart, hunger for righteousness
9. When you pray	Vain repetition	Pray like this . . . (Lord's Prayer)	Purity of heart, honesty, righteousness, faithfulness
10. When you fast	Righteousness for show	Dress with joy	Purity of heart, hunger for righteousness
11. Do not pile up treasures on earth	Moth and rust destroy, thieves enter and steal	Pile up treasures in heaven	Righteousness, purity of heart, faithfulness, patience.
12. No one can serve two masters	Serving God & wealth, anxiety over food/clothes	Seek God's kingdom and righteousness	Righteousness/justice, purity of heart, faithfulness
13. Do not judge, lest you be judged	Judging others means you'll be judged by the same measure	First take the log out of your own eye	Humility, sorrow over sin, merciful, patience, kindness, gentleness
14. Do not give holy things to dogs . . .	They will trample them and tear you to pieces	Give your truth to God in prayer	Purity of heart, faithfulness, forbearance, patience

C.   The church engaging the world

1.   Participating in Christ's reign

As heralds and representatives of the kingdom

I have argued in this chapter that an eschatological ecclesiology implies that being

the church includes both a task and a destiny, which is to pursue the kingdom of God and

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to demonstrate its reality as a sign and foretaste. In investing its time and energy in forming kingdom disciples, the church does not thereby become inward-focused or separate itself from the problems and concerns of the world. Recall that the kingdom of God is broader than the church and as such always aims to impact the world with God's transformative grace, righteousness, justice, and peace. Sometimes people erect false dichotomies between discipleship and evangelism, spiritual formation and social justice, or personal piety and social ethics. However, training kingdom disciples transcends such dichotomies, because the kingdom of God is both redemptive and transformative. It redeems and transforms believers in the church community, equipping them to influence the world as heralds and representatives of a new way to be human under the reign of God. As heralds of the kingdom, Christians proclaim the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord and that that through him a new kind of life is available, one that is abundant, deeply satisfying, full of wisdom and purpose, and characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. Moreover, this new life places one in life-giving relationships with others in a of community of love, faith, and hope, within which one finds acceptance and belonging, encouragement and edification, teaching and instruction, renewal and refreshment, and equipping and commissioning to make a difference in the lives of others and in the world. As representatives of the kingdom, Christian communities embody what they proclaim and proclaim what they embody. As 'salt' and 'light', they exist in the world in a distinctive and provocative way as counter-cultural communities, which exude the character of Jesus Christ, reach out to others with his love and grace, and live out his teachings in joyful

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obedience (Matt 5:13–16).[49] Though they are humble and often outnumbered in society, genuine kingdom representatives have a profound influence on their world. They are like yeast that a baker adds to a bread mixture: just a small amount permeates all of the dough and has a transformative effect on what is finally produced (Matt 13:33; Luke 13:20–21).

As a missional church

One influential concept in contemporary ecclesiology that theologians employ to speak of the church simultaneously in terms of task and destiny, function and identity, is the missional church. I will have some constructively critical things to say about the missional church concept in the final chapter. Presently, however, I suggest that it is fruitful way of thinking about the church's engagement with the world, particularly in the context of our contemporary postmodern culture.

Theologians use the term 'missional' to make several interrelated claims about the church. First, the term reflects the understanding that mission is not simply a sub-category of ecclesiology, but belongs to the essence of what it means to be the church. According to missional church advocates, the church does not merely 'do' mission; rather, the church 'is' mission.[50] Second, the missional concept is based on the missional or sending nature of God (i.e., the *missio Dei*). As Arnold Neufeldt-Fast puts it, "God the Father sends the Son into the world in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring salvation in all its dimensions, that is, God's reign in its fullness."[51] Moreover, "The self-understanding of the church is grounded in the work of God's Spirit who brings the

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49. Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 468–73.
50. Darrell L. Guder, "Missional Theology for a Missionary Church," *Journal for Preachers* 22, no. 1 (1998): 5.
51. Arnold Neufeldt-Fast, "Examining the Believers Church within a Trinitarian-Missional Framework," in *New Perspectives in Believers Church Ecclesiology*, ed. Abe Dueck, Helmut Harder, and Karl Koop (Winnipeg: CMU, 2010), 203.

church into existence as a gathered community, equips and prepares it, and then sends it

into the world to participate fully in God's mission (*missio Dei*)."[52] Accordingly, the

church does not merely 'have' a mission; God has created a sent-church, a missional

church. Third, the missional church concept is based on the missional narrative of the

Bible, which in broad summary includes: (1) God's covenant with Abraham, in which

God promises to bless all nations of the earth through him (Gen 18:18; 22:17–18); (2) the

biblical portrayal of the joint mission of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (e.g., John

14:26; 15:26–27; 20:21–22); (3) biblical statements concerning God's love for the world

(John 3:16; 1 John 4:8); (4) the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20) and the Great

Commandments to love God and neighbour (e.g., Mark 12:29–31). Fourth, the missional

church concept is based on reflection about how the church can faithfully engage

contemporary postmodern, post-Christendom culture with a genuine gospel witness that

is not compromised by unexamined Western cultural assumptions.[53] Fifth, missional

ecclesiology promotes an incarnational, kingdom-oriented, and communal approach to

52. Neufeldt-Fast, "Examining the Believers Church," 204.

53. The concept of the missional church has its roots in the work of Lesslie Newbigin, particularly his observations of modern Western culture and his proposal that the Western church become a 'missionary church' existing as the living 'hermeneutic of the gospel' before God in the midst of the world.[53] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 227–32. In part, this view of the church has arisen out of a renewed emphasis upon the need for the gospel to confront and convert Western culture and to alert the church to the ways in which it has uncritically or unwittingly assimilated Western cultural assumptions into its theology and life. One such assumption, which is challenged by the missional view of the church, is the belief in a Christianized Western culture. This view is often described as the Christendom model and is usually traced back to the Constantinian era, when the church first became a major political and religious force with a secure leadership role in society. In contrast, there is a renewed focus on the need for mission to occur within and convert Western culture itself, as opposed to the traditional understanding that depicts mission as something Western Christianized nations accomplish in foreign countries. The missional church concept is expanded in the works of the Gospel and Our Culture Network, a group of scholars which has developed and applied Newbigin's ideas with the North American context in view. They have published their research and reflection as a collaborative series, entitled *The Gospel and Our Culture Series*. See for example: Guder, *Missional Church* and *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); George R. Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder, eds., *The Church Between Gospel and Culture: The Emerging Mission in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); and Craig Van Gelder, ed., *Confident Witness—Changing World: Rediscovering the Gospel in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

church over-against attractional, consumerist, and individualistic church models.[54] In a

missional view, local congregations do not exist merely for themselves (i.e., their own

wellbeing, growth, and happiness), but are called to serve the broader reign of God in the

world as a kingdom-people sent on a mission. This requires a commitment to go out into

the world to reach people for Christ just as missionaries do, rather than expecting the

world to come to them. It also means directing time and resources outside the church into

the surrounding community and world, rather than pouring time, money, and energy

exclusively into its own buildings, programs, and promotional strategies in order to

attract people to venture through its doors on Sunday mornings. In other words, a

missional church dedicates its time and resources to kingdom growth, not merely to

church growth. Sixth, some of the dominant images or metaphors used by advocates to

depict the missional church include: representing the reign or kingdom of God; the

church as the people of God in exile; the church as resident aliens (borrowing from

Hauerwas and Willimon); the church as an alternate community; and the church as a local

congregation existing as a contextual hermeneutic of the gospel with a missionary

presence in its community.[55]

Resurrection as a model for moving in God's power into new possibilities

In chapter six I proposed that a theology of the cross can serve as a model of

cultural engagement emphasizing the church's role in engaging culture critically (the

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54. For more on the distinction between incarnational and attractional, see Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shape of Things to Come: Innovation and Ministry for the 21st Century Church* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2003), 17–59, 157–58. For concrete examples of churches that are attempting to reach out in incarnational ways, see Lois Y. Barret, ed., *Treasure in Clay Jars: Patterns in Missional Faithfulness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

55. In addition to the books cited in footnote 53, see: Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Intentionally In A Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006); Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); and Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

cross represents God's judgment of human sinfulness, which leads to inauthentic and destructive ways of being human) and in chapter seven I proposed an incarnational model of cultural engagement that emphasizes affirming and contributing to whatever is good, true, and beautiful in human culture. Presently, I propose that the Resurrection can serve as a model of cultural engagement to emphasize living with eschatological hope and imagination to inspire the world with new possibilities for existence. Thinking about cultural engagement through the lens of the Resurrection reminds the church that it does not pursue its mission solely on the basis of its own strengths and resources, but by God's resurrection power. As Lesslie Newbigin argues, when the Christian church engages in mission it is not merely obeying a command (though mission is an imperative) or following a mission strategy (though it is often strategic). Such a narrow view of mission "tends to make mission a burden rather than a joy, to make it part of the law rather than part of the gospel."[56] Primarily, mission results from an explosion of joy in the church community, which overflows into the world.[57] It is the manifestation of the church's experience of the presence and empowering of the Holy Spirit. When the church has been granted a taste of God's presence, God's power, God's grace, and God's reconciliatory and unifying love, it is transformed into a living testimony to the gospel. When it exhibits the selfless and sacrificial love of Christ, living not for itself but for the sake of its neighbours, it lives provocatively as a sign and foretaste of the kingdom of God.[58]

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56. Newbigin. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 116.

57. Newbigin. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 116.

58. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 229. Elsewhere Newbigin writes, "The life of the Church is a real participation in the life of the Triune God, wherein all life and all glory consist in self-giving, a *koinonia* wherein no one will ever say that aught of the things which he possesses is his own. The ultimate mystery of the Church's being is the mystery of love, and love 'seeketh not its own.'" Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God: Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (London: SCM. 1957), 129.

The resurrection as a model of cultural engagement suggests three specific implications. First, it implies being inspired by God's vision for new *possibilities*. Problems often seem insurmountable to those presently encountering them. People need to be inspired with dreams and visions that transcend their present circumstances and lift them into God's greater purposes and plans (Isa 55:8–9). Just as the Old Testament prophets cast a vision of hope and redemption for the people of Israel (e.g., Ezekiel's vision of dead bones coming to life) and as John the seer cast a hopeful vision of the future victory and reign of Christ in the book of Revelation, so God continues to motivate and inspire the church with visions of new possibilities for world transformation. Second, a resurrection model implies moving in God's *power* to accomplish what otherwise would be impossible. Jesus told his disciples that if they only had faith as small as a mustard seed they could move mountains, because nothing that God wills for them is impossible to accomplish (Matt 17:20). According to Paul, the same Spirit that empowered Jesus's ministry and raised Christ from the dead also indwells believers and empowers them for mission (Rom 8:11). Thus, by God's power the church can move in faith and hope to address problems and pursue goals that seem insolvable or unreachable from a finite point of view. Third, a resurrection model implies being refreshed and encouraged in God's *presence*. As Isaiah prophesied long ago, "Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink—even if you have no money! Come, take your choice of wine or milk—it's all free! Why spend your money on food that does not give you strength?" A few verses later, Isaiah continues, "I will give you all the mercies and unfailing love that I promised to David. *He displayed my power by being my witness and a leader among the nations*" (Isa 55:1–2b, 3b–4; emphasis added). In these verses, Isaiah associates faithful and

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effective cultural influence with resting in God's presence and depending on God's

spiritual nourishment. Similarly, Jesus told his disciples, "*Come to me*, all of you who are

weary and carry heavy burdens, and *I will give you rest*. Take my yoke upon you. Let me

teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt

11:28–29; emphasis added). Jesus promised the church not only that it would minister in

his authority and power and not just its own, but also that it would minister in and

through his presence (Matt 28:20). Doing Christ's will and pursuing Christ's mission

requires being continually immersed and refreshed in his presence by the Spirit. As

Newbigin argued, "It is impossible to stress too strongly that the beginning of mission is

not an action of ours, but the presence of a new reality, the presence of the Spirit of God

in power."[59]

2.   Means of engaging the world with eschatological hope and resurrection power

The church is called to engage culture eschatologically through its being,

proclaiming, and doing. First, much of this chapter has sought to demonstrate that as a

community of kingdom formation the church is called to *be* and increasing *become* a

people that practices Jesus's teachings and is thereby characterized by kingdom values,

priorities, commitments, relationships, and worldview. In this sense, "the first social

ethical task of the church is *to be the church*," as Stanley Hauerwas often asserts.[60] The

task of the church is *to be* both a foretaste and an instrument of the coming kingdom—a

living, breathing, walking demonstration of a new way of being human in the midst of the

present, fallen world. To bring genuine transformation to the world, the church itself must

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59.   Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 119.

60.   Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 99 (emphasis added).

undergo continual transformation. It must be, as the Protestant Reformers taught,

simultaneously *reformed and always reforming*.[61]

Second, the church is called to engage culture by proclaiming kingdom values and

pursuing kingdom justice. This includes advocacy for the "little ones" for whom Jesus

cared so much—the poor, the hopeless, the underprivileged, the naked, the sick, the

lonely, and the countless women, men, and children in the world who so often suffer at

the hands of those who are violent and greedy. In essence, it means advocating for human

dignity and protecting human rights in all spheres of life and in all parts of the world. As

Moltmann so eloquently puts it,

> In the name of the creation of the human being in the image of God, in the name
> of the incarnation of God for the reconciliation of the world, and in the name of
> the coming kingdom of God for the fulfillment of history, the church is charged
> with responsibility for the humanity of persons as well as for their rights and
> duties in time. We see the theological contribution of the Christian church in the
> grounding of the fundamental human rights upon God's right to human beings.
> The Christian faith has over and above the different rights and duties of humanity
> to esteem the one indivisible dignity of the human being in his or her life with
> God—without, in so doing, excluding other religious or humanistic conceptions
> of human rights.[62]

The church can play in important role in advocating for human dignity and human rights

by raising awareness of social issues and problems, for starters by teaching their own

congregants that *justice matters* and is essential to the church's mission. It can

deliberately seek to educate and equip its people to be positive agents of change for

God's new creation in whatever spheres of influence in which they operate. It can

encourage people to take an interest in politics and to implore government (by voting,

petitioning, or even direct participation by holding office) to create just laws and policies

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61. On the relevance of this theme for the missional church, see Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church.*

62. Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity. Political Theology and Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), 15.

and to operate with moral integrity. Brian Stiller offers practical and concrete advice in this regard to Canadian believers in his book *From the Tower of Babel to Parliament Hill: How to be a Christian in Canada Today*. Stiller challenges Canadian believers to make a political difference in their culture by proclaiming and living out the gospel in ways that are unabashedly Christian yet peculiarly Canadian (i.e., contextual). He argues that Christian Canadians have a fivefold responsibility, which includes: (1) to remind the nation that it is under God; (2) to remind the nation that it is not eternal or ultimate; (3) to remind Canada that it is part of something larger (globally, cosmologically); (4) to remind its people that political service is a high calling; and (5) to remind the nation that there are consequences for its policies and actions.[63] Stiller also provides several practical tips for engaging culture effectively with the gospel. For example, believers need to get their facts straight and demonstrate an understanding of and sensitivity toward the relevant issues. They should meet the major political players and learn how the Canadian system works (and not assume it is like the American system). They should build coalitions and networks in order to draw on vast resources and create a united front. And they should learn the appropriate place of compromise, recognizing that all relationships require time, effort, and reciprocity.[64] Stiller's suggestions provide a helpful start for churches seeking to reflect deeply about how they can teach and train their members to bear witness and make a different in contemporary Canadian political culture.

Third, the church is called to engage culture in its actions. In so doing, the church must carefully guard itself against being drawn into mere social activism. A regression into mere activism sometimes occurs because churches begin to compromise the

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63. Brian C. Stiller, *From the Tower of Babel to Parliament Hill: How to be a Christian in Canada Today* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1997), 185–88.

64. Stiller, *From the Tower of Babel to Parliament Hill*, 199–202.

uniqueness of Jesus Christ, the importance of correct doctrine, and/or the authority of concrete ethical teachings of the Bible (for example, the Social Gospel Movement or the Unitarian Church). Such churches are in danger of becoming absorbed by the values and causes of contemporary culture and hence compromising the distinctiveness of Christian worldview and moral teaching in favour of political correctness and popular moral trendiness. As Hauerwas helpfully reminds us, the church is not simply another agency that does good, but a people called to bear witness to God's presence in the world.[65] Regression into mere activism can also result when churches that are faithful to Christ and sensitive to hurting and underprivileged people become overwhelmed by the depth and pervasiveness of the world's needs. The needs seem so vast and the urgency of mission so pronounced that other important aspects of Christian life (e.g., community, worship, discipleship, biblical knowledge, etc.) can seem impractical and of lesser importance. Gradually, this can lead to a kind of activism that breeds exhaustion, burnout, and despair. Moreover, it can lead to resentment and judgment of others in the Christian community who have passions and callings that differ from one's own cause. In essence, this approach ends up trying to save the world by its own works, efforts, and plans.

In contrast to such activist approaches, I suggest that a more fitting mode of engagement is an eschatological, grace-based, Spirit-filled, participatory approach. In this approach, believers participate (with resurrection vision, power, and refreshment) in the Spirit's redemptive and transformative ministry in concrete and practical ways by

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65. Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today. Essays on Church, World, and Living in Between* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001), 121.

"planting mustard seeds of deliverance."[66] Such seed-acts serve as transforming kingdom initiatives within the community and society. As "mustard seed planting," this approach emphasizes taking the initiative to act promptly and work diligently while releasing the mountainous magnitude of need to God's responsibility and leaving the results of one's dedicated labour in God's hands. Such an approach promotes neither idealism nor naive optimism, but genuine eschatological *hope* based on God's purposes, promises, power, and in-breaking, liberating presence by the Holy Spirit. As transforming initiatives, such efforts do not simply aim to solve present societal problems, but to initiate a process of transformation by involving people in concrete acts of missional (trans)formation that aim to break vicious cycles of social sin or systemic injustice. Sometimes people look at social problems and respond by saying, "the need is so great; my efforts won't make any difference." But if the focus is on acts of service as missional transforming initiatives, then every contribution holds greater significance—both for the formation of the person and/or community engaged in the act and as a prophetic or eschatological form of concrete witness to the recipient(s) of the act. Serving in a soup kitchen may not solve the problem of social poverty and hunger overnight, but as a transformative initiative and act of missional formation such service can effect real change and have a long-range positive impact on society.

3.   Conclusion: Living with hope in a world of fear and despair

Stanley Hauerwas argues that "the Hebrew-Christian tradition helps us sustain the virtue of hope in a world which rarely provides evidence that such hope is justified."[67] The church is called to bear witness to a new way of being human together in the world,

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66.   Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 53.
67.   Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 166.

one which is framed by the story of God's dealings with humanity in Jesus Christ, directed by God's purposes, priorities, and plans, and oriented toward the glorious new creation by the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Such witness is eschatological in nature. This means that it is inspired by a vision of the future that is grasped by faith and pursued in hope, as we live according to the reality of the new creation in the present in anticipation of its eschatological fulfilment in glory. Such hope-filled witness does not just happen automatically, but must be cultivated through disciplined character formation empowered by God's Spirit. Consequently, the church must commit to being a community of kingdom formation that teaches and trains disciples of Jesus Christ to be representatives and witnesses of God's reign. Only a church that is immersed in the grace and transformative presence of God, built upon and shaped according to the teachings of Jesus, and guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit can exist as a hope-filled sign, foretaste, and instrument God's kingdom in a world full of fear and despair.

Chapter 9:
Conclusion: Church for the Twenty-First Century

A. Introduction

This dissertation explored the significance of theological anthropology for

ecclesiology with a view to clarifying the nature and purpose of the church's inner

community life and its outward engagement with the world in mission. Part I outlined the

challenge to be addressed. Chapter one identified common problems afflicting attempts to

define the human person in contemporary culture and the unfortunate consequences that

follow from our culture's 'anthropological agnosticism,' including the dissolution of

human community, the dichotomization and disintegration of personal and social ethics,

and the collapse of social and global justice. Chapter two argued that different models of

community depend on different conceptions of what it means to be human. It identified

and analyzed several models of community operative in contemporary culture based

(implicitly or explicitly) on differing conceptions of the human person and suggested

ways in which these models are impacting the church. It concluded that none are fully

satisfying theologically. Part II consisted of three chapters outlining a theological

anthropology in trinitarian perspective, each of which addressed one dimension of being

human and its corresponding teleological emphasis. Chapter three depicted the human

person as a relational creature whose *telos* is to love God and other human beings and to

care for God's world. Chapter four depicted the human person as a rational creature

whose *telos* is to know God and understand God's created world. Chapter five depicted

the human being as an eschatological creature whose *telos* is to serve God and others as

steward-priests of the new creation. Part III consisted of three chapters paralleling those

in section II, thus depicting the church as relational, rational, and eschatological

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communities of the new humanity. An overriding theme in Parts II and III was to connect

ethics with both personhood and community/ecclesiology in an integrated way, in order

to resolve dualisms and false dichotomies that continually plague the church's inner

social life (e.g., individualism vs. collectivism) and its outer engagement with the world

in mission (e.g., 'spiritual' vs. 'humanitarian' goals and advocacy). In this final chapter I

will draw out and summarize some key conclusions and implications of the dissertation

for the integration of the church's inner life and outward mission. I will then briefly draw

some preliminary implications that follow from viewing the church as God's new

humanity called to promote and embody the welfare and flourishing of all human beings.

B.   Inner community life of the church as the new humanity

1.   A community in union with Christ in the Spirit

One of the aims of this dissertation was to gain a better grasp of the nature of the

church's inner sociality. The ground of Christian community is the union of believers

with Christ and one another in the Spirit. Union with Christ is neither something that

Christians achieve nor an ideal toward which they strive, but a reality that the Spirit has

established and that Christians receive by faith and subsequently 'live into.' This corrects

two common misunderstandings of the social nature of the church. At one extreme end of

the spectrum is a conception of the church as a purely voluntary association, in which

becoming a member is like joining a club. One joins together with others who possess

like beliefs, preferences, and/or interests, which in the present socio-historical context

often reflect the egocentric values of contemporary North American consumer culture.

The church is conceived not as being intrinsically related to Christian life and salvation

but as a secondary support system that enriches the private spiritual lives of individual

Christians. At the other end of the spectrum is a conception of the church that lacks an appropriate place for personal choice. This view stresses that church commitment is more stable than choosing an association on the basis of one's personal or family preferences. Conversely, one enters the church by birth or simply attends whatever congregation is closest to one's home (i.e., the parish concept) regardless of differences of belief, doctrine, or one's sense of personal calling to a congregation.

In contrast to both of these extremes, I want to stress the importance of balancing both choice and deep commitment. In place of 'personal voluntary choice' I would stress making a responsible decision with wisdom and discernment. Such wise discernment does take one's personal and family needs into account, but places them within a larger frame of discerning one's calling to serve God's people as part of God's missional and transformative purposes for the world. Accordingly, while a personal decision is involved, the emphasis is not on the congregation that *I am choosing* but on wisely discerning the congregation that *God is choosing for me* to enjoy, serve, and partner with others in God's missional kingdom community. In place of unconditioned commitment to the church of one's birth, geographical location, or denominational affiliation, I would emphasize the importance of entering by faith into the covenant community.[1] As Stanley Grenz points out, the biblical notion of covenant is grounded in important beliefs and core convictions but also provides a deeper bond of sociality than purely voluntary, associative, or institutional notions.[2] Grenz writes, "The covenant enhances the community dimension of the church. Indeed, the presence of the covenant is what

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1.   One's calling might be to a particular denomination or association of churches (especially pastors ordained by a particular group), though the calling to a denomination is relative to basic faith commitments, not absolute in itself.

2.   Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 465.

transforms a loosely related group of people into a community."[3] The covenant binds

people to God and to one another in faith and implies sharing the benefits of the

community as well as the responsibility of contributing to and serving the community and

its mission.[4] This involves a deep spiritual bond of fellowship in the Holy Spirit (not

merely vague or sentimental feelings of togetherness), who indwells every believer and

draws each into union with others "in Christ" who is in turn "in the Father" (John 17:20–

23). What I am essentially endorsing is a modified form of congregationalism. This

retains the voluntary aspect of the church as a community *of faith* but also places a strong

emphasis on the social and spiritual bond between believers, in order to counter the

powerful influence of consumerism, individualism, and pluralism in contemporary

Western societies—to which free churches are particularly vulnerable.[5]

Another way of describing the deep spiritual bond of believers in the church is by

recognizing the social nature of Christian life, wherein God draws believers to participate

together in the life of the Trinity (see chapters 3 and 6). Recall that an important purpose

of the church is to serve God's redemptive and transformative plan to heal and restore

human relationships by reconciling believers to God and to one another through Christ in

the Spirit. Since human sinfulness has destructive social ramifications (*cor curvum in se*,

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3. Grenz, *Theology*, 480.

4. Grenz writes, "By establishing the eschatological community of love, the covenant people, God brings into being a new humankind, a people who mirror for all creation the divine character and essence" (*Theology*, 489).

5. See Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company· The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 75. Grenz similarly argues in favour of what he calls "balanced congregationalism," in which the essence of the church lies with its people who join voluntarily but not simply as an aggregate collection of individuals (Grenz, *Theology*, 471–72). Miroslav Volf, in his own free church proposal, helpfully distinguishes between organic and associative church structures. Organic structures refer to "communities of being," which are groups into which one is born (e.g., family, tribe, ethnicity, etc.), while associative structures are alliances created for achieving specific ends and goals. He argues that the church cannot be neatly classified into either category but transcends both. One *joins* the church by *spiritual birth*. Consequently, Volf suggests the term "sibling friends" to describe the social bond between believers. See Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness· The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 179–81.

alienation, oppression, etc.), redemption and eschatological transformation must also

have an intrinsically social dimension. As Lesslie Newbigin asserts, drawing also on the

eschatological orientation of the church,

> In the final consummation of God's loving purpose we and all creation will be
> caught up into the perfect rapture of that mutual love which is the life of God
> Himself. What is given to us now can only be a foretaste, for none of us can be
> made whole till we are made whole together.[6]

In this sense, the church is not just a community of spiritual benefit or growth; it is

actually a community of salvation. Moreover, it is not just an instrumental means or an

external aid to salvation, but is itself a dimension of the salvific experience.[7] To clarify,

as stated in chapter six, this is not because the church is an institutional dispenser of

salvation (e.g., Luther's target: the medieval church system) but because it is the

community in which reconciliation is embodied and transformation takes place. It is the

place in which redeemed human persons practice and live out intentionally, concretely,

and holistically their restored relationships with God and others. To account fully for the

importance of the church in Christian soteriology, one needs to grasp the comprehensive,

life-integrating, and eschatological character and orientation of Christian redemption. We

might capture this vision briefly as follows: The church is the community of salvation;

Christian salvation integrates a whole and distinctive way of life; Jesus describes this life

as genuine, blessed, and abundant existence in the kingdom of God; existence in the

kingdom of God is characterized by the eschatological 'already–not yet' dynamic and

implies a journey of being and becoming; the interplay between being and becoming

toward the goal of eschatological fulfilment takes place through spiritual and character

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6.   Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God. Lectures on the Nature of the Church* (London: SCM, 1957), 130.

7.   Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 174.

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formation; spiritual and character formation shapes whole persons in the entirety of their existence in the world—individually and socially, personally and vocationally, spiritually and ethically, ecclesially and missionally.

An emphasis on union with Christ and participation in the life of the Trinity is a helpful corrective to the rival models of human community explored in chapter two. All but one of those models are grounded in individualism, self interest, or self preservation. They consequently lack a sufficiently other-oriented motivation for community and relational grounds for human sociality. The model of community implied by the ethics of care (i.e., concentric circles of care) provides a better relational starting point, but it lacks theological or otherwise transcendent grounding for the primacy of relationships. In the final analysis, its selection of 'caring' as the ultimate criterion for ethics is arbitrary. All of the models explored in chapter two thus lack a sufficiently relational ontology of personhood and community. Union with Christ and participation in the life of the Trinity also provides a helpful corrective to many forms of evangelical ecclesiology (my own tradition). Many theological critics have observed that the purpose and significance of the church are ambiguous in the evangelical tradition. On the one hand, church seems to be a matter of peripheral importance to many Evangelicals, subordinate to the personal spiritual growth and well being of individuals. Church has secondary importance as a means to this end, but it is often not valued as an end in itself. Many tend to see the church as a kind of spiritual gymnasium, an aid to personal spiritual 'fitness' and growth but not intrinsic to salvation. On the other hand, many of the most vibrant and growing churches in North America in recent history have been evangelical churches. Accordingly, John Stackhouse suggests that while Evangelicals have often not articulated

their ecclesiology explicitly, they do nevertheless live one out implicitly by their actions and life together.[8]

In any case, the charge of many theologians (both within and outside the evangelical movement) that Evangelicalism lacks a coherent ecclesiology has merit.[9] Theologians and historians have attributed the ecclesiological ambivalence of evangelicals to deep-seated roots in the historical origins and development of the movement. For example, Stanley Grenz points to the parachurch ethos of historic evangelicalism, in which a desire to be inclusive led to an emphasis on general commonalities rather than ecclesiological precision.[10] Others have pointed to various additional factors, some of which include: widespread disillusionment with established church structures following the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the influence of pietism and the religious awakenings, which promoted individual religious experience, experimentation, and an anti-institutional and anti-ecclesial bias; the critique of established churches by radical reformation and free church traditions leading to an ad-hoc approach to ecclesiology (and ironically in some cases to a tradition of denying traditions), the impact of democracy and the importance of individual choice,

8.   John G. Stackhouse, Jr., "Preface," in *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion?*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 9. Commenting on David Bebbington's now classic description of evangelicalism which identifies its four key characteristics as crucicentrism, biblicism, conversionism, and activism, Leanne Van Dyk observes, "Noticeably absent in these common lists of evangelical characteristics are references to the church, including liturgy, worship, tradition, sacraments, ordination, or church government." Leanne Van Dyk, "The Church in Evangelical Theology and Practice," in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 128. Van Dyk notes that these characteristics were identified by the 1996 Angus Reid Survey given to three thousand Americans and are similar to other lists of distinctive evangelical markers. While her point is interesting and perhaps indicates that evangelicals lack a *distinctive* ecclesiology, it does not prove that evangelicals have no ecclesiology. Ecclesiological details do not appear on Bebbington's list because they are not of themselves distinctive of the movement (e.g., Bebbington also does not refer to the Trinity, even though mainstream Evangelicals clearly affirm it).

9.   For examples (and responses), see the various essays in John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

10.   See Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000).

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and the American spirit of entrepreneurship and the influence of market values.[11] In light

of such observations, Van Dyk suggests that the "ecclesiological imagination among

evangelicals must expand, deepen, and grow more textured. But this ecclesiological

deficit can only be overcome if the theological exploration is thorough and integrative."[12]

It is my hope that the view of the church as the new humanity united together through

Christ in the Spirit, as cast in this dissertation, will assist in expanding, deepening, and

enriching such ecclesiological imagination.

2.   An ethical community

As a transformative community the church is also intrinsically an ethical

community, a place of personal and social ethical orientation and formation. This

dissertation discussed the ethical nature of the church in three dimensions, in order to

draw out the intrinsically and holistically ethical character of the church as the new

humanity. Specifically, the church is a relational community of love, a rational

community of faith, and an eschatological community of hope. Each of these dimensions

implies that Christian life impacts not just personal ethics, but also social, cultural, and

global ethics. First, as a relational community of love, the church is a community of

reconciliation. It embodies the reconciliatory message of the gospel as believers commit

to living together in love and peace, as brothers and sisters reconciled by the atoning

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11.   For a helpful survey of these historical roots and developments, see Van Dyk, "The Church in
Evangelical Theology and Practice," 125–28. See also: Grenz, *Renewing the Center*; D. G. Hart, "The
Church in Evangelical Theologies, Past and Future," in *The Community of the Word Toward an
Evangelical Ecclesiology*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005),
23–40 and *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand
Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004); Bruce Hindmarsh, "Is Evangelical Ecclesiology an Oxymoron?" in
Evangelical Ecclesiology. Reality or Illusion?, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker
Academic, 2003), 15–38; Mark A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity. An Introduction* (Oxford:
Blackwell, 2001); and George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand
Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

12.   Van Dyk, "The Church in Evangelical Theology and Practice," 132.

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death of Jesus Christ. This life together includes other ethically significant commitments, including edifying others, bearing the burdens of others, and forming counter cultural relationships as cruciform disciples of Jesus. Second, as a rational community of faith the church seeks to impart wisdom to its members, which equips them to flourish and live meaningful and impactful lives. Such wisdom combines genuine knowledge of and faith in God with accurate and practical knowledge about the world in order to live according to God's purposes. Third, as an eschatological community of hope, the church has both a task and a destiny with respect to the present-yet-coming kingdom of God. Its task is to participate with God in serving and expanding the kingdom in its community life and actions. As a kingdom community, the church is composed of people who are committed to the values and priorities of God's kingdom and who live out those values and priorities in how they think, relate, treat others (especially those who are different or are marginalized), make decisions, spend their money, and use their time and other resources. In addition to being the church's task and calling, the kingdom of God is also the church's destiny. While in the present era there is a distinction between the church and the kingdom, one day the church will enter fully into the kingdom of God. Presently, it is called to be an instrument, sign, and foretaste of the coming kingdom.

The ethical dimension of the church as the new humanity offers a helpful corrective to the rival models of community analyzed in chapter two. Love defines the church's relational-ethical dimension (chapters 3 and 6) and overcomes the deficiencies of mechanistic, individualistic, and/or self-preserving conceptions of community (e.g., rationalism, existentialism, sociobiology). Faith defines the church's rational-ethical dimension (chapters 4 and 7) and overcomes the deficiencies of communities based upon

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abstract ethical systems or generalizations, which lack 'thick' descriptive frameworks combining traditions, narratives, and basic convictions in the context of formative communities. Hope defines the church's eschatological-ethical dimension (chapters 5 and 8) and overcomes the deficiencies of communities that lack a valid teleological orientation (i.e., an adequate understanding of the purpose and destiny of human beings) and/or separate being from becoming. All of the rival models surveyed offer reductionist explanations of the human *telos*. For example, existentialist models separate being from becoming and focus on the latter to the exclusion of the former (the future desires and present choices of individuals trump the significance of tradition, history, and community well being). With respect to my own evangelical church context, conceiving the church as ethical communities of the new humanity helps to overcome false dualisms and dichotomies that have often plagued the tradition, such as personal versus social ethics, justification versus sanctification, body versus soul, spirituality versus social justice, evangelism versus humanitarian work, and holiness and purity versus incarnational affirmation and the enjoyment of creation and culture. In my view these are not dualistically opposed but dialogically enriching. It is perilous to separate them and/or to emphasize one over the other. Neglecting one's body by failing to get enough rest makes it difficult to fast and pray;[13] likewise, inattention to moral and spiritual values can lead to physical harm (e.g., casual sex leading to emotional instability and possibly sexually transmitted diseases). Neglecting justice leads to false spirituality; ignoring spiritual reality prevents us from pursing and establishing holistic justice. Neglecting the need for humanitarian work harms the church's evangelistic witness; failure to evangelize (leading

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13.   James C. Peterson makes a similar point in *Changing Human Nature· Ecology, Ethics, Genes, and God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 76.

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to worldview transformation) undermines the very values that ground humanitarian work (e.g., Christian love/charity, human dignity and intrinsic worth). Denying the goodness of creation and the affirmation of bodily life degenerates holiness and purity into sectarian legalism; neglecting an appropriate emphasis on holiness and purity leads us to abuse the good things (and people) that God has created and entrusted to us.

3.   A formative community of kingdom disciples oriented to the new creation

As a deeply relational and intrinsically ethical human community that is oriented to God's presence and purposes, the church is inherently a formative community. In chapter six we observed that the church is a community of relational formation. It is a community called together by the gospel of reconciliation and devoted to the Great Commandments of loving God and others. Moreover, it is a community of persons who speak God's Word to each other in order to teach, edify, encourage, correct, and sometimes even rebuke each another in love. The constitutive practices of Baptism and the Lord's Supper have definitive implications for Christian relationships. The former ratifies the new life together in Christ while the latter brings us into regular communion with Christ and others and reminds us that Christian life together involves mutual care, support, interdependence, and the sharing of resources. Moreover, the formative practices of solitude and confession help maintain the integrity and authenticity of the Christian community.

In chapter seven we observed that the church is a community of rational formation; more specifically, it is a community dedicated to cultivating wisdom. It cultivates wisdom through theological formation, by which members grow in knowledge that equips them for wise living and shapes their worldview in light of Christian truth and

basic convictions. The church also cultivates wisdom in its members through the ministry of the preached Word, which provides theological and practical instruction for Christian faith and life. Moreover, by practicing the sacramental ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Christians remember, rehearse, and celebrate the ministry and saving work of Jesus Christ. These constitutive church practices are deeply formational for the minds of Christian disciples, uniting them to the life of Christ and the tradition of the historic Christian church. In addition, Christian worship is deeply formative for Christian thinking and living. In worship, believers join with others to celebrate God's character, creativity, providence, and saving deeds. Such worship reminds Christians of God's faithfulness in the past and promises for the future, thus reinforcing the worldview and framework that equips them to think theologically and make wise life decisions. Similarly, participation in spiritual disciplines such as meditation, study, receiving guidance from others, and prayer (meditative, contemplative, supplication) can help Christians grow in knowledge, faith, and thus wisdom. Finally, the church fosters wisdom cultivation by calling wise leaders to serve as models, teachers, mentors, and guides to instruct and equip the whole church to discern God's voice and to grow in obedience, maturity, witness, and service in its communal life and mission.

Chapter eight described the church as a community of kingdom character formation that immerses believers in the drama of Scripture and Christian worldview and helps them to cultivate the Christian virtues. Such virtues are cultivated within the context of a community of disciples dedicated to following the concrete ethical teachings of Jesus. They include: (1) love, faith, and hope as the foundational virtues of the new humanity; (2) virtues related to the health of the kingdom community; and (3) virtues

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related to a congregation's contextual missional calling. The chapter highlighted several

ecclesial practices that foster kingdom character formation. First, the ministry of the

preached Word as a kingdom practice creatively and imaginatively helps people to

indwell the Scriptures and to see themselves as characters in God's ongoing drama of

creation, redemption, and eschatological transformation. Such preaching aims to help

people envision God's reign and exhorts them to live accordingly. Second, as

eschatological practices, the sacramental ordinances immerse believers dramatically,

symbolically, and corporeally in God's salvation story and direct them toward its grand

finale. Baptism emphasizes new spiritual birth (or new creation) into a Spirit-filled life,

which anticipates the believer's final transformation in glory. The Lord's Supper looks

forward to the wedding feast of the Lamb and the great banquet in the consummated

kingdom of God and fills believers with hope, inspiration, and power to live as kingdom

people in the present. Third, worship as an eschatological practice continually renews the

church in its kingdom identity, mission, and destiny. Fourth, prayer patterned after the

Lord's Prayer characterizes those who earnestly seek first the kingdom of God. Finally,

the church as an eschatological community of kingdom character formation initiates

disciples of Jesus into practicing 'transforming initiatives,' which are concrete actions

that break vicious cycles of sin by demonstrating and nurturing characteristic patterns of

kingdom thinking and living.

C.   The church engaging the world as the new humanity

         The threefold ethical dimension of the church as the new humanity forms the

basis of its engagement with the world. The church lives out of its ethical dimension and

engages the world not merely by its own strength, vision, and resources, but by

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participating by the Spirit in Christ's ministry and mission in the world. Thus, it engages

the world relationally by participating in Christ's *priestly* ministry as ambassadors of

reconciliation. It engages the world rationally (in wisdom) by participating in Christ's

prophetic ministry as witnesses and servant of the truth. It engages the world

eschatologically by participating in Christ's *reign* as heralds and representatives of the

kingdom of God.

1.   Participating by the Spirit in Christ's mission

This dissertation proposed a participatory model of engaging the world in

mission, which emphasizes participating by the Spirit in the *missio Dei*. First, the church

participates in Christ's priestly ministry as ambassadors of reconciliation. In so doing it

proclaims and enacts the good news of peace and reconciliation leading to restored

relationships with God and other human beings. Both *speaking* the message and *being* the

message, as God's other-centred, exocentric community of love, are crucial. Second, the

church participates in Christ's prophetic ministry as witnesses and servants of the truth by

seeking to influence the world toward wise living. This involves proclaiming and

demonstrating the truth of Christian faith in compelling, winsome ways. It means

declaring the explicit truth content of the gospel through baptizing and making disciples,

training and teaching them all that Christ instructed, and relying on Christ's authoritative

and revelatory presence while bearing witness. Third, the church participates in Christ's

reign as heralds and representatives of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God orients

the identity of the church toward its task and destiny, which is to be and increasingly

become a kingdom community of the new creation. Moreover, conceiving the church in

terms of both task and destiny leads to a missional understanding of the church, in which

mission is a defining or constitutive element of what it means to be the church.

2.   Social-ecclesial ethics of love, faith, and hope

The ecclesiology developed in this dissertation promotes a threefold model of

cultural engagement, which I described as the social-ecclesial ethics of love, faith, and

hope. The social-ecclesial ethics of love reflects the exocentric, ecstatic nature of the

church as a relational community filled with the overflowing Love (Spirit) of God

(chapter 6). God's love is evident in both God's YES to humanity as God intends it to be

and God's NO to sinful and destructive distortions of God's purposes for human beings.

Accordingly, I suggested that a theology of the cross provides us with a helpful model of

cultural engagement emphasizing both (negatively) God's judgment and (positively)

God's redemptive activity by the death of Christ. Such a model exhorts the church to be

critical of culture (all human cultures), to expose oppression, and to advocate for justice

in all human relationships and social structures. While the church's specific mission must

be discerned concretely in the context of local congregations, I proposed that three

principles provide helpful guidelines. These include discerning what God is doing and

joining in to participate in God's work, sharing the burdens of a congregation's local

community, and partnering with others who are pursuing social justice, reconciliation,

and peace. Such means of engagement follow the church's call to live-out-love in the

midst of an egocentric world.

The social-ecclesial ethics of faith reflects the nature of the church as a rational

community of wisdom formation and propagation (chapter 7). I proposed that the

Incarnation provides the church with a model of cultural engagement emphasizing going

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out into the world (rather than expecting the world to come to the church), reaching

people by forming relationships and investing in others, and recognizing and actively

forming bridges of mutual understanding and agreement wherever they can be found. As

an overarching guideline for engaging the world wisely, I proposed the general theme of

pursuing and contributing to whatever is good, true, and beautiful, thereby infusing the

world with implicit Christian values and principles and demonstrating the comprehensive

coherence of the Christian faith. Through such means, Christians demonstrate what it

means to live by faith in a world that is full of distrust and scepticism.

The social-ecclesial ethics of hope reflects the nature of the church as an

eschatological community of the new creation (chapter 8). I proposed that the

Resurrection offers a hope-filled model of cultural engagement and transformation. In

particular, a resurrection model implies that the church's missional engagement with

culture receives inspiration from God's vision for new *possibilities*, moves in God's

power to persevere and accomplish what otherwise would not be possible, and is

refreshed and encouraged by God's ongoing *presence* with the church as it pursues its

mission. The means of engaging culture in eschatological hope involve the church's

being, proclaiming, and doing. As a community of kingdom formation the church is

committed to being and becoming increasingly a people characterized by Jesus's

teachings, values, priorities, commitments, worldview and relationships. In its ministry of

proclamation, the church promotes kingdom values within society and advocates for

kingdom justice as it continually prays to the Father in Jesus's name: "May your kingdom

come; May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Moreover, the church engages

culture by performing deeds and actions that are characteristic of the kingdom. Such

activity is not mere activism, but involves participating with the Spirit of God in "mustard seed planting" by practicing "transforming missional initiatives" that break vicious cycles of social sin and structural evil by gradually forming both practitioners and society in the ways of the kingdom. Through such being, proclaiming, and acting Christians demonstrate the hope of the gospel in the midst of a world characterized by fear and despair.

Christ and Culture: Which posture best suits the church as the new humanity?

In his classic book *Christ and Culture*, H. Richard Niebuhr proposes a five-fold typology as a heuristic devise for analyzing and organizing characteristic ways that various church traditions have understood and practiced the relation of church to culture.[14] The first type, Christ *against* culture, generally has a negative view of human culture and consequently emphasizes rejecting culture out of loyalty to Jesus Christ. It posits a clear line of separation between the church and the world and envisions the church as a separate community or society. Examples Niebuhr provides of this approach include Tertullian, Tolstoy, and the Anabaptists. The second type, Christ *of* culture, sees Christianity as the fulfilment of the human cultural impulse to overcome the limitations of nature. It envisions harmony between church and society and depicts the church as a progressive religious association. Representatives of this type include Abélard, Kant, Locke, Jefferson, the early Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and cultural Protestantism generally. The third type, Christ *above* culture, involves a synthesis of church and culture in which the church directs people to their supernatural end, assists in the ordering of social-temporal life, and is the custodian of divine law. In contemporary ecclesiological terms

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14. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).

this type epitomizes a Christendom model of church.[15] Representatives of the synthetic

type include Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, and especially Thomas Aquinas. The

fourth type, Christ and culture *in paradox*, envisions church and culture in a paradoxical

yet dialogical relationship, in which the tension between church and culture helps to

preserve the legitimacy of both. Representatives of this type include Luther and

Kierkegaard. The fifth and final type, Christ the *transformer* of culture, contends against

both the cultural pessimism of type one and the accommodation to culture evident in type

two. Niebuhr argues that this type characterizes mainstream Christianity (as represented

by Augustine and Calvin) and that it most resembles type four but demonstrates a more

optimistic attitude toward culture. It stresses the biblical-theological themes of creation,

fall, redemption (in history), and eschatology (God's power to transform present

circumstances).

Of these options, the posture most befitting the church *as the new humanity* is

Niebuhr's transformative type, though with certain qualifications. The theological

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15.   Craig Carter criticizes Niebuhr's typology with being thoroughly compromised by Christendom assumptions and values. He writes, "By calling *Christ and Culture* a product of and apology for Christendom, I mean that it takes Christendom for granted as its starting point and assumes that Christendom is real, permanent, and on the whole a good thing. Although there is no state church in the United States, there is a strong sense of America being a Christian nation and of the church having a key role to play in maintaining public morality, inspiring patriotism in the citizenry, and giving religious legitimacy to the government." See Craig A. Carter, *Rethinking Christ & Culture· A Post-Christendom Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2006), 56. While I appreciate some aspects of Carter's critique of Niebuhr (granted, Niebuhr does not account for the complexity and historical variants of Anabaptism), I do not finally find his argument convincing. I personally do not find Niebuhr arguing that Christendom is "real, permanent, and on the whole a good thing." Actually, in some ways Niebuhr distances himself from Christendom thinking, for instance he criticizes the synthetic type (the only type that in my view corresponds closely to the Christendom model) for having an over-realized eschatology (*Christ and Culture*, 147). I also do not see where Niebuhr talks about "inspiring patriotism" or "granting religious legitimacy to the government" (whatever that means?). Carter also charges Niebuhr with failing to recognize that an "against culture" stance can be a way of impacting a society. However, Niebuhr explicitly acknowledges this: his position is that the "Christ against culture" type is both a necessary and an inadequate response (see *Christ and Culture*, 65–81). Carter's underlying presupposition is his commitment to pacifism. He accordingly categorizes as "Christendom" any theology of culture that rejects pacifism. See the chart which depicts Carter's six proposed types, dividing them evenly into two broad categories—Christendom/non-pacifist and non-Christendom/pacifist (*Rethinking Christ & Culture*, 113). This seems to me to be overly simplistic.

anthropology and corresponding ecclesiology developed in this dissertation requires a more nuanced view of the church's role in transforming culture. First, it requires that we speak not primarily about the church transforming culture or even of Christ transforming culture but rather of the church as *participating* by the Spirit in the transformative ministry and mission of the Son to the glory and honour of the Father. Second, it posits that this socially transformative mission has a threefold ethical dimension. In love, the church participates in Christ's priestly ministry of relational transformation and engages culture in a cruciform pattern modelled after the theology of the cross (i.e., putting others first, serving, breaking through socio-economic or cultural walls that typically divide people; see chapter 6, section C.1). By faith and knowledge leading to wisdom, the church participates in Christ's prophetic ministry of rational transformation with the Incarnation as its model of cultural engagement. And in hope, the church participates in Christ's kingly ministry (or reign) of eschatological transformation guided by a resurrection model of cultural engagement. Third, it is important to stress that all three of these dimensions are important and that neglecting or focusing exclusively on one leads to a distortion of Christian mission.[16] For example, an exclusive focus on the cruciform model leads to a sectarian stance and/or a martyr complex. An exclusive focus on the incarnational model leads to antinomianism, rationalism, and epistemological naivety. And an exclusive focus on the resurrection model leads to triumphalism, false optimism, or utopian idealism. The church must balance all three modes of witness and discern

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16.   John Stackhouse similarly argues that various mission contexts call for different responses. He sees a place for each of Niebuhr's types, but favours as normative a combination of types four and five. See John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Making the Best of It: Following Christ in the Real World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). My position is somewhat similar to his, but instead of proposing a hybrid I am embracing a more nuanced version of the transformative view (with due attention to missional context and the three dimensions of transformation—relational, rational, and eschatological).

which mode to emphasize according to its missional context and the opportunities and challenges that its particular context presents to the proclamation of the gospel and the extension of the kingdom.[17]

3.   A Trinitarian revision of missional ecclesiology

In chapter eight I argued in favour of a missional understanding of the church. Here I want to offer a word of constructive criticism of at least some versions of missional theo-logic in light of the trinitarian-participatory ecclesiology endorsed in this dissertation. Missional church advocates criticize the tendency of traditional approaches to ecclesiology to derive the church directly from Christology and consequently neglect to include mission as a constitutive element of ecclesiology. Instead, they propose that ecclesiology must be derived from missiology. Unfortunately however, this sometimes leads missional church thinkers into a tendency to depict Christian life and community in overly instrumental or functional terms whereby church becomes merely a means to an end (this is probably not the intent of such writers, but I would argue that it is the logical conclusion of their position). For instance, one popular missional thinker argues that *cause creates community*. He insists, "We build community incidentally, when our imaginations and energies are captured by a higher, even nobler cause . . . Christian community results from the greater cause of Christian mission."[18] The intention behind

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17.   For example, the Confessing Church's context in Nazi Germany at the height of Hitler's power called primarily for a cruciform approach to cultural engagement, though even then the resurrection and incarnation models were necessary to sustain hope and affirm the value of all human life (e.g., Bonhoeffer argued incarnationally that Christ was present especially in the oppressed Jewish brother). Bonhoeffer himself affirmed all three models at different times, the theology of the cross in the early to mid 1930s (evident in *Creation and Fall*, the "Lectures on Christology," and *Discipleship*), the Incarnation from the mid 1930s to the early 1940s (evident in *Life Together* and *Ethics*), and resurrection near the end of his life while in prison (in the prison letters Bonhoeffer's reflections on the future are filled with hope and faith in new possibilities for a post-Nazi Germany).

18.   Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Intentionally In A Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006), 108. For similar statements by other authors in the missional church discussion, see Darrell L.

this statement is helpful, namely to caution the church against becoming inwardly fixated

and viewing its communal life as an end in itself. However, I suggest that the author

overstates his case; he maintains the end-means dichotomy and simply reverses the trend

by reducing the church to a means instead of an end. Moreover, out of a desire to

emphasize mission, advocates of the missional church sometimes downplay the personal

and relational aspects of ecclesiology in favour of functional or task-oriented ones. For

example, consider the following claims of Darrell Guder:

> The biblical record places *no emphasis* on the special significance of conversion
> stories.
>
> *One does not find a concern* for 'the establishment of their personal well-being in
> their relationship with God' in the stories of the call of Abraham, Moses, the
> prophets, the disciples or Paul. The issue in these encounters is not 'the saving of
> their souls' or 'their experience of grace and salvation.'
>
> [T]he experience of the benefits [of salvation] is *always subordinated* to the call
> and its purpose.[19]

Guder accordingly argues for the "preeminence of witness as *the fundamental definition*

of the church," for 'witness' as the "*all-encompassing definition* of Christian existence,"

and subordinates other important functions of the church to witness including

proclamation, community, and service/ministry.[20] This position, along with similar views

expressed in the missional church literature, leads to a functional or task-oriented

understanding not only of the church and human relationships, but also of God and the

Scriptures (mission becomes a controlling theological metanarrative).[21]

Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 4–6, 8, 19, 227; and Darrell L. Guder, *Be My Witnesses: The Church's Mission, Message, and Messengers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 44.

19. Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 129 (emphasis added).

20. Guder, *Be My Witnesses*, 109, 233, 49 (emphasis added).

21. See Darrell L. Guder , "Missional Theology for a Missionary Church," *Journal for Preachers* 22, no. 1 (1998), 7 and *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 129. See also Allan Janssen, review of *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, by Darrell L. Guder, ed. *Perspectives* 14 (April 1999): 21; Andreas J. Köstenberger, review of *Confident Witness, Changing World*,

In contrast to the functionalism implied by some accounts of missional ecclesiology, it is important to ground the church's mission in the love and ecstatic character of God. While it is true that God sends the church on a mission to the world, it is crucial to recognize that before God sends the church God must create, reconcile, renew, edify, and empower it. God's people can be authentic witnesses in the world only if they know God intimately and experience the transformative presence of God's Spirit. As Newbigin reminds us, mission results from an explosion of joy in the church community, which overflows into the world.[22] Consequently, the missional church movement is correct in placing mission within the essence of the church, but only if it defines the missional nature of the church in primarily relational terms rather than functional ones (though not to the exclusion of functions). The problem is not that missional church advocates understand mission as being part of the essence of the church, but that some emphasize doing over being, corporate and objective aspects of salvation over personal and subjective aspects, and existing-for-others over existing-in-community.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's missional ecclesiology provides a helpful corrective to this line of thinking.[23] Following the logic of the creation-fall-redemption narrative, Bonhoeffer demonstrates that the church must exist simultaneously for the sake of its own community and for the sake of others. To illustrate his point, Bonhoeffer distinguishes the church community from two other types of social gathering. First, he

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Rediscovering the Gospel in North America, by Craig Van Gelder, ed., *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 36 (January 2000): 114.

22. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 116.

23. See my article, "Bonhoeffer's Missional Ecclesiology," *McMaster Journal of Theology and Ministry* 9 (2007–2008): 96–128.

distinguishes it from "society."[24] Society is "an association of rational action," for which

people accept responsibility only out of their own self-interest in pursuing a common

goal. Christian community, by contrast, is part of the social structure of life and, as such,

is an end willed by God. Moreover, while personal bonds in society are expressed in

looseness or indifference, in community they are expressed in closeness or intimacy. In

addition, while society is joined voluntarily and secured contractually, Christian

community is created and preserved by God.[25] Secondly, community should not be

confused with the concept of the 'mass,' by which Bonhoeffer means a group of people

drawn together by a common stimulus.[26] In such a group, people come together to share a

common experience (a theatre audience, a rock concert, a literary circle, etc.) and their

community is the by-product of that common experience. Bonhoeffer argues that while

the 'mass' represents the simplest form and most powerful feeling of unity, and thus can

be deceptively idealistic, it is not built upon the separateness of persons and cannot last

beyond the common experience. For Bonhoeffer, Christian community is never a human

ideal or utopian dream, but a divine reality established by Christ in the Spirit. Bonhoeffer

shows that the Christian church community exists *both* as an end in itself *and* as a means

to a greater end in the eschatological reality of already and not-yet. It exists for the sake

of itself because God's missional intention is to establish a new creation, a community of

love and new life in which people live in restored communion with God and one another.

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24. Bonhoeffer draws on Ferdinand Tönnies's distinction between community (*Gemeindschaft*) and society (*Gesellschaft*). See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, vol. 1 *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, ed. Clifford C. Green, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 89–91. I recognize that Tönnies's sociological model is obsolete, but I find Bonhoeffer's conceptual use of Tönnies helpful for constructive and heuristic purposes.

25. See also James B. Torrance, "The Covenant Concept in Scottish Theology and Politics and its Legacy," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34, no. 3 (1981): 225–43.

26. Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 94.

Yet, the church also exists for others because its Lord, Jesus Christ, the "man for others,"

is conforming it to his own image (the *imago Dei*), which means being-free-for others. To

employ an Augustinian trinitarian analogy, divine community within the Godhead does

not derive from some impersonal, instrumental cause, law, or mechanism, but from God's

ecstatic nature as Love. Augustine thus uses the image of Lover, Beloved, and Love to

depict the Trinity.[27] Divine community is primarily a perichoretic union of love, not an

instrumental association of common purpose (though the latter does flow from the

former). In this relational sense, everything the church does is indeed mission. The

church exists to experience and share the reconciliation and intimate communion with

God and others that the gospel of Christ makes possible; everything it does embodies and

bears witness to this. Thus, Bonhoeffer locates mission within the essence of the church

without thereby reducing the latter to instrumental or functional categories. Accordingly,

his missional ecclesiology is able to provide theological grounding for understanding the

church both as a community of love and worship *and* as an agent of social justice that

stands in solidarity with the "the least of these" (Matt 25)—the poor, hungry, sick,

rejected, oppressed, and suffering other.[28]

Being missional means being a church that exists for others, not merely in the

sense of being outward-focused or outreach-driven, but more foundationally in the sense

of being *essentially* a relational, ecstatic entity. The church is a part of God's plan to

deliver women and men from the destructive social consequences of human sin.

Originally created in God's image to be free-for-God-and-others, human beings became

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27. Augustine, *The Trinity* V/5.14, vol. 5 *The Works of St. Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City, 1991), 255.

28. For an exploration of Bonhoeffer's christological critique of oppression and injustice, see my article "Bonhoeffer's Anti-Logos and its Challenge to Oppression," *Crux* 41, no. 2 (2005): 2–9.

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corrupted by sin and are ensnared in idolatry and self-centredness. Originally created

with a heart oriented toward God and others, fallen human beings now possess a heart

turned in upon itself. Redemption from sin, consequently, includes redemption from self-

captivity, self-isolation, and the self's attempt to have absolute dominion over others

(including God). The church is the place where God turns people inside-out, bringing

them together into union with Christ in one Spirit, thus reversing their self-orientation

and freeing them to love and serve God and others. To be sure, as the eschatological

emphasis of chapter eight of this dissertation emphasized, the church is not the final

consummation of God's plan or the full realization of God's kingdom. Nevertheless, God

intends the church to be a sign and foretaste of what is to come, a sacrament and catalyst

of the kingdom.

D.   The church in the service of human flourishing: some preliminary implications

Many Protestant Christians in North America are accustomed to thinking about

church in consumerist and individualistic terms. They begin with 'me and my or my

family's needs,' subsequently seek out a church that caters to those needs, then possibly

consider getting involved in the ministry of the church, and perhaps finally express

interest in the church's kingdom mandate and its broader mission to the world. In

contrast, the view of the church presented in this dissertation encourages us to think in the

reverse order. Conceiving the church as the new humanity helps us understand that the

church is essential to God's global project of redeeming and transforming all human

beings and all human societies and cultures. We must therefore begin our thinking about

the church with the loving, ecstatic nature and character of the triune God, which

undergirds God's own mission of redeeming and transforming the world. Ecclesiology is

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first and foremost theocentric. As the Body of Christ, the People of God, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the church is oriented and dedicated to the presence and purposes of the Trinity. Its primary focus should be to participate with God in pursuing and expanding God's kingdom (in its full, broader-than-just-the-church sense; see chapter 8) in response to the Great Commandments (e.g., Mark 12:29–31) and the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20). The establishment of God's kingdom and the mission it entails for the church implies that the church must be a community of kingdom character formation, which trains Christian disciples in the way of Jesus Christ. When looking to join a congregation, Christians should seek out those that excel not in satisfying the needs of religious consumers but in training and equipping believers for ministry in the church and for mission in the world (i.e., see the formative practices and means of engagement discussed in chapters 6–8). Involvement in such churches will align their thinking, desires, and priorities; lesser needs and desires can still be addressed, but only in due order (Matt 6:33). Moreover, believers will find that God meets many of their deepest needs through their involvement in such communities.

In terms of the 'big picture' for ecclesiology, the church as the new humanity serves human flourishing as an assigned mandate from God. The contours of what it means for human beings to flourish are set within the framework of a distinctly Christian worldview, which includes (see chapter 7): fundamental convictions about the identity and character of the trinitarian God and God's dealings with humanity; fundamental convictions about human beings as God's relational, rational, and eschatological creatures to whom God relates as Reconciler, Creator, and Transformer; fundamental convictions about the human *telos*, which includes loving God and other human beings,

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knowing God and understanding God's created world, and serving God and others as steward-priests of creation; a theological grasp of the salvation narrative that recognizes its four great plot movements of creation, sin, redemption, and eschatological transformation; fundamental convictions about what constitutes a genuine and satisfying human life; and fundamental convictions about where one finds trustworthy and authoritative teaching concerning what constitutes a genuine and satisfying human life (Scripture, experience of the Holy Spirit, tradition, and reason; see chapter 4, section C.3.a).

On the basis of the theological anthropology and Christian worldview represented within this dissertation, let me briefly mention five ways in which the church is called to advocate for and pursue the flourishing of all human beings. It should be emphasized that these suggestions are preliminary and require a fuller treatment than can be offered at present. They identify topics that deserve future treatment in light of the conclusions of this dissertation. First, the church must be concerned about the personal ethics of its individual members. The church is called to be a community of kingdom character formation with a threefold emphasis: relational formation, wisdom formation, and missional formation in light of God's kingdom and the new creation. Second, the church must be concerned about social ethics. Loving God includes loving one's neighbour, not just the neighbours in one's own church community but also the fellow human beings in one's broader network of relationships and society. As Kathryn Tanner argues, the church is not properly a separate society (sociologically), but a formative voluntary—and I would add covenantal—community within a wider human society that lives out a different way of life. The church exists to impact society by active engagement and

involvement, not just by trying to bring people into its fold.[29] Third, the church must be

concerned with politics because the gospel has socio-political implications for large-scale

human relationships and institutions.[30] The church and the state have different roles to

play in promoting God's justice, yet both have the mandate of fostering human

flourishing and, in this respect, they are united in purpose (though not always in

agreement concerning the best means of achieving that purpose).[31] Christians begin to

think politically whenever they ask the question: how do we serve our neighbours and

influence our society strategically and effectively (i.e., in an organized way)? This is a

question that the church simply must not neglect and much more work needs to be done

to answer it, not just in general terms but from within particular contexts—countries,

states/provinces, regions, cities, municipalities, and local institutions. For example, with

respect to my own Canadian context, there are likely to be insights from how Christians

think and act in the United States or England, but such cannot be automatically

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29. Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture. A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 97–103.

30. John Howard Yoder helps us see the thoroughly political nature of Jesus's ministry and mission. We might not agree with Yoder on all of the exegetical questions and their implications, but we are indebted to Yoder for alerting us to the political relevance of Jesus in a particularly clear and compelling way. See *The Politics of Jesus Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) and *Body Politics. Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World* (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 2001).

31. Having said this, it is important also to emphasize that the church has a God-given mandate over-against the state, which is to call it to account and sometimes even to engage in active resistance when the state oversteps its authority by violating or neglecting its God-given mandate to serve human flourishing. When the state does this, it ceases truly to be the state (as God intended, as a steward of God's own justice) and has become a usurper and imposter. See Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 388–94. Elsewhere, Bonhoeffer argues that the power of government is a "gift from above," not something existing merely for its own sake in autonomy from God. See his discussion of the divine character of government and the relationship between government and church in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment· 1940–1945*, vol. 16 Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, ed Mark S. Brocker, trans. Lisa E. Dahill (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 513–28. Note that Bonhoeffer distinguishes between 'state' as an ancient pagan concept and 'government' as the New Testament describes it. He writes, "State means an ordered commonwealth; government is the power that creates and upholds the order" (p. 503). And, "Government is the power set in place by God to exercise worldly rule with divine authority. Government is the vicarious representative action of God on earth. It can only be understood from above" (p. 504). Moreover, Bonhoeffer limits the authority of the government both in terms of the cross (taking account of sin) and eschatologically (only the future city of God, the new Jerusalem, will God exhibit God's perfect justice). In addition, Bonhoeffer argues that both church and state find their legitimacy and true vocation only in and through Christ the Mediator (pp. 511–12).

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implemented across national or other cultural borders. Neither the United States nor

England can provide settled models for the work of the church in Canada. Different

contexts call for different forms of response.[32] Fourth, the church must be concerned

about global justice, in faithful response to the question: who is my neighbour *in a*

globalized context? Answer: whoever falls within my sphere of influence and power to

help, thus making an ethical claim on me as a responsible steward-priest of the new

creation (in a global age this sphere is large, though more defuse than it used to be,

particularly for many Christians in the global North and West). Christians must always

remember that God's redemptive plan concerns reaching the whole world with the whole

gospel.[33] Pursuing God's global missional call depends upon the universality (or

catholicity) and unity of the world-wide church, because no single congregation,

denomination, parachurch organization, or theological tradition can fulfill the global call

to mission on its own. Seeking the establishment of the kingdom of God in the whole

world requires partnership. I do not believe that this requires institutional uniformity, but

it does require of all Christians an openness to other churches and Christian traditions and

a commitment to partnering together to pursue the cause of justice and righteousness for

the nations. Finally, pursuing human flourishing requires active dialogue and relationship

building with the world's major religions and their representatives. Different worldviews

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32. See for example: John Douglas Hall, "The Changing North American Context of the Church's Ministry," "A Theological Proposal for the Church's Response to Its Context," and "The Church and Its Ministry: Responding to the Changing Context in Worship, Preaching, Education, Outreach," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 22, no. 6D (1995): 402–50; Seymour Martin Lipset, *Continental Divide: The Values and Institutions of the United States and Canada* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) and "What Happened to Christian Canada?," *Church History* 75 (June 2006): 245–73; and Brian C. Stiller, *From the Tower of Babel to Parliament Hill: How to be a Christian in Canada Today* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1997).

33. John Stott, ed., *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement 1974–1989* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

undergird and exhort different conceptions of ethics and justice.[34] At the same time,

common ground can be found and a degree of ethical consensus can be reached (as

evidenced by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights voted unanimously by the

member nations of the United Nations, despite the differences in the interpretation and

implementation of the declarations by various member countries and cultures).[35] Such

dialogue and relationship building involves much grace, charity, goodwill, humility,

patience, diligence, and hope-filled endurance, while simultaneously guarding the

uniqueness of Christian theological convictions.[36] It involves a contest of conflicting

worldviews, which is threatening for all parties involved. Yet, as Christians we can enter

such relations with confidence because we believe that Jesus Christ is the hope of

humanity, the desire of the nations, the ultimate answer to all of our deepest questions

and longings. May the church of Jesus Christ never lose its confidence in this great truth!

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34.   Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press), 1988.

35.   See the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," in *Human Rights Documents: Compilation of Documents Pertaining to Human Rights*, 63–68. Washington: Committee on Foreign Affairs, 1983.

36.   H. Richard Niebuhr helpfully writes, "[T]he fact that Christians have found kinship between Christ and the prophets of the Hebrews, the moral philosophers of Greece, the Roman Stoics, Spinoza, and Kant, humanitarian reformers and Eastern mystics, may be less indicative of Christian instability than of a certain stability in human wisdom. Though apart from Christ it is difficult to find unity in what is sometimes called the great tradition of culture, with his aid such a unity can be discerned." Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 107–8.

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